Alexander Pope

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN

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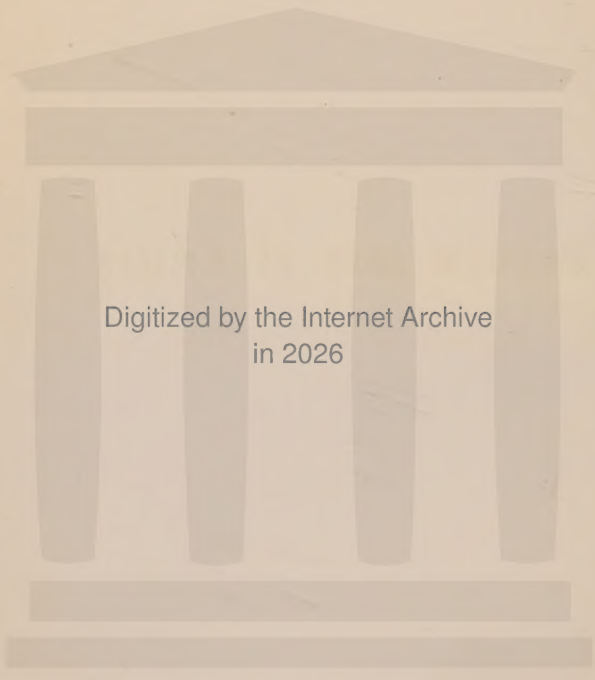
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English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

ALEXANDER POPE

DISCARD

BY

LESLIE STEPHEN

NEW YORK
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PREFATORY NOTE.

The life and writings of Pope have been discussed in a literature more voluminous than that which exists in the case of almost any other English man of letters. No biographer, however, has produced a definitive or exhaustive work. It seems, therefore, desirable to indicate the main authorities upon which such a biographer would have to rely, and which have been consulted for the purpose of the following necessarily brief and imperfect sketch.

The first life of Pope was a catchpenny book, by William Ayre, published in 1745, and remarkable chiefly as giving the first version of some demonstrably erroneous statements, unfortunately adopted by later writers. In 1751, Warburton, as Pope's literary executor, published the authoritative edition of the poet's works, with notes containing some biographical matter. In 1769 appeared a life by Owen Ruffhead, who wrote under Warburton's inspiration. This is a dull and meagre performance, and much of it is devoted to an attack—partly written by Warburton himself—upon the criticisms advanced in the first volume of Joseph Warton's Essay on Pope. Warton's first volume was published in 1756; and it seems that the dread of Warburton's wrath counted for something in the delay of the second volume, which did not appear till 1782. The Essay contains a good many anecdotes of interest. Warton's edition of Pope —the notes in which are chiefly drawn from the Essay—was published in 1797. The Life by Johnson appeared in 1781; it is admirable in many ways; but Johnson had taken the least possible trouble in ascertaining facts. Both Warton and Johnson had before them the manuscript collections of Joseph Spence, who had known Pope personally during the last twenty years of his life, and wanted nothing but literary ability to have become an efficient Bos-

well. Spence's anecdotes, which were not published till 1820, give the best obtainable information upon many points, especially in regard to Pope's childhood. This ends the list of biographers who were in any sense contemporary with Pope. Their statements must be checked and supplemented by the poet's own letters, and innumerable references to him in the literature of the time. In 1806 appeared the edition of Pope by Bowles, with a life prefixed. Bowles expressed an unfavourable opinion of many points in Pope's character, and some remarks by Campbell, in his specimens of English poets, led to a controversy (1819–1826) in which Bowles defended his views against Campbell, Byron, Roscoe, and others, and which incidentally cleared up some disputed questions. Roscoe, the author of the life of Leo X., published his edition of Pope in 1824. A life is contained in the first volume, but it is a feeble performance; and the notes, many of them directed against Bowles, are of little value. A more complete biography was published by R. Carruthers (with an edition of the works), in 1854. The second, and much improved, edition appeared in 1857, and is still the most convenient life of Pope, though Mr. Carruthers was not fully acquainted with the last results of some recent investigations, which have thrown a new light upon the poet's career.

The writer who took the lead in these inquiries was the late Mr. Dilke. Mr. Dilke published the results of his investigations (which were partly guided by the discovery of a previously unpublished correspondence between Pope and his friend Caryll), in the *Athenæum* and *Notes and Queries*, at various intervals, from 1854 to 1860. His contributions to the subject have been collated in the first volume of the *Papers of a Critic*, edited by his grandson, the present Sir Charles W. Dilke, in 1875. Meanwhile Mr. Croker had been making an extensive collection of materials for an exhaustive edition of Pope's works, in which he was to be assisted by Mr. Peter Cunningham. After Croker's death these materials were submitted by Mr. Murray to Mr. Whitwell Elwin, whose own researches have greatly extended our knowledge, and who had also the advantage of Mr. Dilke's advice. Mr. Elwin began, in 1871, the publication of the long-promised edition. It was to have occupied ten volumes—five of poems and five of correspondence, the latter of which was to include a very large proportion of previously unpublished matter. Unfortunately for all students of English literature, only two volumes of poetry

and three of correspondence have appeared. The notes and prefaces, however, contain a vast amount of information, which clears up many previously disputed points in the poet's career; and it is to be hoped that the materials collected for the remaining volumes will not be ultimately lost. It is easy to dispute some of Mr. Elwin's critical opinions, but it would be impossible to speak too highly of the value of his investigations of facts. Without a study of his work, no adequate knowledge of Pope is attainable.

The ideal biographer of Pope, if he ever appears, must be endowed with the qualities of an acute critic and a patient antiquarian; and it would take years of labour to work out all the minute problems connected with the subject. All that I can profess to have done is to have given a short summary of the obvious facts, and of the main conclusions established by the evidence given at length in the writings of Mr. Dilke and Mr. Elwin. I have added such criticisms as seemed desirable in a work of this kind, and I must beg pardon by anticipation if I have fallen into inaccuracies in relating a story so full of pitfalls for the unwary.

L. S.

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POPE.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY YEARS.

The father of Alexander Pope was a London merchant, a devout Catholic, and not improbably a convert to Catholicism. His mother was one of seventeen children of William Turner, of York; one of her sisters was the wife of Cooper, the well-known portrait-painter. Mrs. Cooper was the poet's godmother; she died when he was five years old, leaving to her sister, Mrs. Pope, "a grinding-stone and muller," and their mother's "picture in limning;" and to her nephew, the little Alexander, all her "books, pictures, and medals set in gold or otherwise."

In after-life the poet made some progress in acquiring the art of painting; and the bequest suggests the possibility that the precocious child had already given some indications of artistic taste. Affectionate eyes were certainly on the watch for any symptoms of developing talent. Pope was born on May 21, 1688 — the *annus mirabilis* which introduced a new political era in England, and was fatal to the hopes of ardent Catholics. About the same

time, partly, perhaps, in consequence of the catastrophe, Pope's father retired from business, and settled at Binfield, a village two miles from Wokingham and nine from Windsor. It is near Bracknell, one of Shelley's brief perching places, and in such a region as poets might love, if poetic praises of rustic seclusion are to be taken seriously. To the east were the "forests and green retreats" of Windsor; and the wild heaths of Bagshot, Chobham, and Aldershot stretched for miles to the south. Some twelve miles off in that direction, one may remark, lay Moor Park, where the sturdy pedestrian, Swift, was living with Sir W. Temple during great part of Pope's childhood; but it does not appear that his walks ever took him to Pope's neighbourhood, nor did he see, till some years later, the lad with whom he was to form one of the most famous of literary friendships. The little household was presumably a very quiet one, and remained fixed at Binfield for twenty-seven years, till the son had grown to manhood and celebrity. From the earliest period he seems to have been a domestic idol. He was not an only child, for he had a half-sister, by his father's side, who must have been considerably older than himself, as her mother died nine years before the poet's birth. But he was the only child of his mother, and his parents concentrated upon him an affection which he returned with touching ardour and persistence. They were both forty-six in the year of his birth. He inherited headaches from his mother, and a crooked figure from his father. A nurse who shared their care lived with him for many years, and was buried by him, with an affectionate epitaph, in 1725. The family tradition represents him as a sweet-tempered child, and says that he was called the "little nightingale" from the beauty of his voice. As the sickly, solitary, and preco-

cious infant of elderly parents, we may guess that he was not a little spoilt, if only in the technical sense.

The religion of the family made their seclusion from the world the more rigid, and by consequence must have strengthened their mutual adhesiveness. Catholics were then harassed by a legislation which would be condemned by any modern standard as intolerably tyrannical. Whatever apology may be urged for the legislators on the score of contemporary prejudices or special circumstances, their best excuse is that their laws were rather intended to satisfy constituents, and to supply a potential means of defence, than to be carried into actual execution. It does not appear that the Popes had to fear any active molestation in the quiet observance of their religious duties. Yet a Catholic was not only a member of a hated minority, regarded by the rest of his countrymen as representing the evil principle in politics and religion, but was rigorously excluded from a public career, and from every position of honour or authority. In times of excitement the severer laws might be put in force. The public exercise of the Catholic religion was forbidden, and to be a Catholic was to be predisposed to the various Jacobite intrigues which still had many chances in their favour. When the Pretender was expected in 1744, a proclamation, to which Pope thought it decent to pay obedience, forbade the appearance of Catholics within ten miles of London; and in 1730 we find him making interest on behalf of a nephew, who had been prevented from becoming an attorney because the judges were rigidly enforcing the oaths of supremacy and allegiance.

The Catholics had to pay double taxes, and were prohibited from acquiring real property. The elder Pope, according to a certainly inaccurate story, had a conscien-

tious objection to investing his money in the funds of a Protestant government, and, therefore, having converted his capital into coin, put it in a strong-box, and took it out as he wanted it. The old merchant was not quite so helpless, for we know that he had investments in the French *rentes*, besides other sources of income; but the story probably reflects the fact that his religious disqualifications hampered even his financial position.

Pope's character was affected in many ways by the fact of his belonging to a sect thus harassed and restrained. Persecution, like bodily infirmity, has an ambiguous influence. If it sometimes generates in its victims a heroic hatred of oppression, it sometimes predisposes them to the use of the weapons of intrigue and falsehood, by which the weak evade the tyranny of the strong. If under that discipline Pope learnt to love toleration, he was not untouched by the more demoralizing influences of a life passed in an atmosphere of incessant plotting and evasion. A more direct consequence was his exclusion from the ordinary schools. The spirit of the rickety lad might have been broken by the rough training of Eton or Westminster in those days; as, on the other hand, he might have profited by acquiring a livelier perception of the meaning of that virtue of fair-play, the appreciation of which is held to be a set-off against the brutalizing influences of our system of public education. As it was, Pope was condemned to a desultory education. He picked up some rudiments of learning from the family priest; he was sent to a school at Twyford, where he is said to have got into trouble for writing a lampoon upon his master; he went for a short time to another in London, where he gave a more creditable if less characteristic proof of his poetical precoc-

ity. Like other lads of genius, he put together a kind of play—a combination, it seems, of the speeches in Ogilby's Iliad—and got it acted by his schoolfellows. These brief snatches of schooling, however, counted for little. Pope settled at home at the early age of twelve, and plunged into the delights of miscellaneous reading with the ardour of precocious talent. He read so eagerly that his feeble constitution threatened to break down, and when about seventeen, he despaired of recovery, and wrote a farewell to his friends. One of them, an Abbé Southcote, applied for advice to the celebrated Dr. Radcliffe, who judiciously prescribed idleness and exercise. Pope soon recovered, and, it is pleasant to add, showed his gratitude long afterwards by obtaining for Southcote, through Sir Robert Walpole, a desirable piece of French preferment. Self-guided studies have their advantages, as Pope himself observed, but they do not lead a youth through the dry places of literature, or stimulate him to severe intellectual training. Pope seems to have made some hasty raids into philosophy and theology; he dipped into Locke, and found him "insipid;" he went through a collection of the controversial literature of the reign of James II., which seems to have constituted the paternal library, and was alternately Protestant and Catholic, according to the last book which he had read. But it was upon poetry and pure literature that he flung himself with a genuine appetite. He learnt languages to get at the story, unless a translation offered an easier path, and followed wherever fancy led, "like a boy gathering flowers in the fields and woods."

It is needless to say that he never became a scholar in the strict sense of the term. Voltaire declared that he could hardly read or speak a word of French; and his

knowledge of Greek would have satisfied Bentley as little as his French satisfied Voltaire. Yet he must have been fairly conversant with the best known French literature of the time, and he could probably stumble through Homer with the help of a crib and a guess at the general meaning. He says himself that at this early period he went through all the best critics; all the French, English and Latin poems of any name; "Homer and some of the greater Greek poets in the original," and Tasso and Ariosto in translations.

Pope, at any rate, acquired a wide knowledge of English poetry. Waller, Spenser, and Dryden were, he says, his great favourites in the order named, till he was twelve. Like so many other poets, he took infinite delight in the *Faery Queen;* but Dryden, the great poetical luminary of his own day, naturally exercised a predominant influence upon his mind. He declared that he had learnt versification wholly from Dryden's works, and always mentioned his name with reverence. Many scattered remarks reported by Spense, and the still more conclusive evidence of frequent appropriation, show him to have been familiar with the poetry of the preceding century, and with much that had gone out of fashion in his time, to a degree in which he was probably excelled by none of his successors, with the exception of Gray. Like Gray, he contemplated at one time the history of English poetry, which was in some sense executed by Warton. It is characteristic, too, that he early showed a critical spirit. From a boy, he says, he could distinguish between sweetness and softness of numbers—Dryden exemplifying softness, and Waller sweetness; and the remark, whatever its value, shows that he had been analysing his impressions and reflecting upon the technical secrets of his art.

Such study naturally suggests the trembling aspiration, "I, too, am a poet." Pope adopts with apparent sincerity the Ovidian phrase,

> "As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
> I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came."

His father corrected his early performances, and, when not satisfied, sent him back with the phrase, "These are not good rhymes." He translated any passages that struck him in his reading, excited by the examples of Ogilby's Homer and Sandys' Ovid. His boyish ambition prompted him, before he was fifteen, to attempt an epic poem; the subject was Alcander, Prince of Rhodes, driven from his home by Deucalion, father of Minos; and the work was modestly intended to emulate in different passages the beauties of Milton, Cowley, Spenser, Statius, Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Claudian. Four books of this poem survived for a long time, for Pope had a more than parental fondness for all the children of his brain, and always had an eye to possible reproduction. Scraps from this early epic were worked into the Essay on Criticism and the Dunciad. This couplet, for example, from the last work comes straight, we are told, from Alcander,—

> "As man's Mæanders to the vital spring
> Roll all their tides, then back their circles bring."

Another couplet, preserved by Spense, will give a sufficient taste of its quality:—

> "Shields, helms, and swords all jangle as they hang,
> And sound formidinous with angry clang."

After this we shall hardly censure Atterbury for approving (perhaps suggesting) its destruction in later years.

Pope long meditated another epic, relating the foundation of the English government by Brutus of Troy, with a superabundant display of didactic morality and religion. Happily this dreary conception, though it occupied much thought, never came to the birth.

The time soon came when these tentative flights were to be superseded by more serious efforts. Pope's ambition was directed into the same channel by his innate propensities, and by the accidents of his position. No man ever displayed a more exclusive devotion to literature, or was more tremblingly sensitive to the charm of literary glory. His zeal was never distracted by any rival emotion. Almost from his cradle to his grave his eye was fixed unremittingly upon the sole purpose of his life. The whole energies of his mind were absorbed in the struggle to place his name as high as possible in that temple of fame, which he painted after Chaucer in one of his early poems. External conditions pointed to letters as the sole path to eminence, but it was precisely the path for which he had admirable qualifications. The sickly son of the Popish tradesman was cut off from the Bar, the Senate, and the Church. Physically contemptible, politically ostracized, and in a humble social position, he could yet win this dazzling prize and force his way with his pen to the highest pinnacle of contemporary fame. Without adventitious favour, and in spite of many bitter antipathies, he was to become the acknowledged head of English literature, and the welcome companion of all the most eminent men of his time. Though he could not foresee his career from the start, he worked as vigorously as if the goal had already been in sight; and each successive victory in the field of letters was realized the more keenly from his sense of the disadvantages in face of

which it had been won. In tracing his rapid ascent, we shall certainly find reason to doubt his proud assertion,—

"That, if he pleased, he pleased by manly ways;"

but it is impossible for any lover of literature to grudge admiration to this singular triumph of pure intellect over external disadvantages, and the still more depressing influences of incessant physical suffering.

Pope had, indeed, certain special advantages which he was not slow in turning to account. In one respect even his religion helped him to emerge into fame. There was naturally a certain free-masonry amongst the Catholics allied by fellow-feeling under the general antipathy. The relations between Pope and his co-religionists exercised a material influence upon his later life. Within a few miles of Binfield lived the Blounts of Mapledurham, a fine old Elizabethan mansion on the banks of the Thames, near Reading, which had been held by a royalist Blount in the civil war against a parliamentary assault. It was a more interesting circumstance to Pope that Mr. Lister Blount, the then representative of the family, had two fair daughters, Teresa and Martha, of about the poet's age. Another of Pope's Catholic acquaintances was John Caryll, of West Grinstead in Sussex, nephew of a Caryll who had been the representative of James II. at the Court of Rome, and who, following his master into exile, received the honours of a titular peerage and held office in the melancholy court of the Pretender. In such circles Pope might have been expected to imbibe a Jacobite and Catholic horror of Whigs and freethinkers. In fact, however, he belonged from his youth to the followers of Gallio, and seems to have paid to religious duties just as much attention as would satisfy his parents. His mind was really given to

literature; and he found his earliest patron in his immediate neighbourhood. This was Sir W. Trumbull, who had retired to his native village of Easthampstead in 1697, after being ambassador at the Porte under James II., and Secretary of State under William III. Sir William made acquaintance with the Popes, praised the father's artichokes, and was delighted with the precocious son. The old diplomatist and the young poet soon became fast friends, took constant rides together, and talked over classic and modern poetry. Pope made Trumbull acquainted with Milton's juvenile poems, and Trumbull encouraged Pope to follow in Milton's steps. He gave, it seems, the first suggestion to Pope that he should translate Homer; and he exhorted his young friend to preserve his health by flying from tavern company—*tanquam ex incendio.* Another early patron was William Walsh, a Worcestershire country gentleman of fortune and fashion, who condescended to dabble in poetry after the manner of Waller, and to write remonstrances upon Celia's cruelty, verses to his mistress against marriage, epigrams, and pastoral eclogues. He was better known, however, as a critic, and had been declared by Dryden to be, without flattery, the best in the nation. Pope received from him one piece of advice which has become famous. We had had great poets—so said the "knowing Walsh," as Pope calls him—"but never one great poet that was correct;" and he accordingly recommended Pope to make correctness his great aim. The advice doubtless impressed the young man as the echo of his own convictions. Walsh died (1708) before the effect of his suggestion had become fully perceptible.

The acquaintance with Walsh was due to Wycherley, who had submitted Pope's Pastorals to his recognized critical authority. Pope's intercourse with Wycherley and

another early friend, Henry Cromwell, had a more important bearing upon his early career. He kept up a correspondence with each of these friends, whilst he was still passing through his probationary period; and the letters, published long afterwards under singular circumstances to be hereafter related, give the fullest revelation of his character and position at this time. Both Wycherley and Cromwell were known to the Englefields of Whiteknights, near Reading, a Catholic family, in which Pope first made the acquaintance of Martha Blount, whose mother was a daughter of the old Mr. Englefield of the day. It was possibly, therefore, through this connexion that Pope owed his first introduction to the literary circles of London. Pope, already thirsting for literary fame, was delighted to form a connexion which must have been far from satisfactory to his indulgent parents, if they understood the character of his new associates.

Henry Cromwell, a remote cousin of the Protector, is known to other than minute investigators of contemporary literature by nothing except his friendship with Pope. He was nearly thirty years older than Pope, and, though heir to an estate in the country, was at this time a gay, though rather elderly, man about town. Vague intimations are preserved of his personal appearance. Gay calls him "honest, hatless Cromwell with red breeches;" and Johnson could learn about him the single fact that he used to ride a-hunting in a tie-wig. The interpretation of these outward signs may not be very obvious to modern readers; but it is plain from other indications that he was one of the frequenters of coffee-houses, aimed at being something of a rake and a wit, was on speaking terms with Dryden, and familiar with the smaller celebrities of literature, a regular attendant at theatres, a friend of actresses, and able

to present himself in fashionable circles and devote complimentary verses to the reigning beauties at the Bath. When he studied the *Spectator* he might recognize some of his features reflected in the portrait of Will Honeycomb. Pope was proud enough for the moment at being taken by the hand by this elderly buck, though, as Pope himself rose in the literary scale and could estimate literary reputations more accurately, he became, it would seem, a little ashamed of his early enthusiasm, and, at any rate, the friendship dropped. The letters which passed between the pair during four or five years, down to the end of 1711, show Pope in his earliest manhood. They are characteristic of that period of development in which a youth of literary genius takes literary fame in the most desperately serious sense. Pope is evidently putting his best foot forward, and never for a moment forgets that he is a young author writing to a recognized critic — except, indeed, when he takes the airs of an experienced rake. We might speak of the absurd affectation displayed in the letters, were it not that such affectation is the most genuine nature in a clever boy. Unluckily, it became so ingrained in Pope as to survive his youthful follies. Pope complacently indulges in elaborate paradoxes and epigrams of the conventional epistolary style; he is painfully anxious to be alternately sparkling and playful; his head must be full of literature; he indulges in an elaborate criticism of Statius, and points out what a sudden fall that author makes at one place from extravagant bombast; he communicates the latest efforts of his muse, and tries, one regrets to say, to get more credit for precocity and originality than fairly belongs to him; he accidentally alludes to his dog that he may bring in a translation from the Odyssey, quote Plutarch, and introduce an anecdote which he has heard from

Trumbull about Charles I.; he elaborately discusses Cromwell's classical translations, adduces authorities, ventures to censure Mr. Rowe's amplifications of Lucan, and, in this respect, thinks that Brebœuf, the famous French translator, is equally a sinner, and writes a long letter as to the proper use of the cæsura and the hiatus in English verse. There are signs that the mutual criticisms became a little trying to the tempers of the correspondents. Pope seems to be inclined to ridicule Cromwell's pedantry, and when he affects satisfaction at learning that Cromwell has detected him in appropriating a rondeau from Voiture, we feel that the tension is becoming serious. Probably he found out that Cromwell was not only a bit of a prig, but a person not likely to reflect much glory upon his friends, and the correspondence came to an end, when Pope found a better market for his wares.

Pope speaks more than once in these letters of his country retirement, where he could enjoy the company of the muses, but where, on the other hand, he was forced to be grave and godly, instead of drunk and scandalous as he could be in town. The jolly hunting and drinking squires round Binfield thought him, he says, a well-disposed person, but unluckily disqualified for their rough modes of enjoyment by his sickly health. With them he has not been able to make one Latin quotation, but has learnt a song of Tom Durfey's, the sole representative of literature, it appears, at the "toping-tables" of these thick-witted fox-hunters. Pope naturally longed for the more refined, or at least more fashionable indulgences of London life. Besides the literary affectation, he sometimes adopts the more offensive affectation—unfortunately not peculiar to any period—of the youth who wishes to pass himself off as deep in the knowledge of the world.

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Pope, as may be here said once for all, could be at times grossly indecent; and in these letters there are passages offensive upon this score, though the offence is far graver when the same tendency appears, as it sometimes does, in his letters to women. There is no proof that Pope was ever licentious in practice. He was probably more temperate than most of his companions, and could be accused of fewer lapses from strict morality than, for example, the excellent but thoughtless Steele. For this there was the very good reason that his "little, tender, crazy carcass," as Wycherley calls it, was utterly unfit for such excesses as his companions could practise with comparative impunity. He was bound under heavy penalties to be through life a valetudinarian, and such doses of wine as the respectable Addison used regularly to absorb would have brought speedy punishment. Pope's loose talk probably meant little enough in the way of actual vice, though, as I have already said, Trumbull saw reasons for friendly warning. But some of his writings are stained by pruriency and downright obscenity; whilst the same fault may be connected with a painful absence of that chivalrous feeling towards women which redeems Steele's errors of conduct in our estimate of his character. Pope always takes a low, sometimes a brutal view of the relation between the sexes.

Enough, however, has been said upon this point. If Pope erred, he was certainly unfortunate in the objects of his youthful hero-worship. Cromwell seems to have been but a pedantic hanger-on of literary circles. His other great friend, Wycherley, had stronger claims upon his respect, but certainly was not likely to raise his standard of delicacy. Wycherley was a relic of a past literary epoch. He was nearly fifty years older than Pope. His

last play, the *Plain Dealer*, had been produced in 1677, eleven years before Pope's birth. The *Plain Dealer* and the *Country Wife*, his chief performances, are conspicuous amongst the comedies of the Restoration dramatists for sheer brutality. During Pope's boyhood he was an elderly rake about town, having squandered his intellectual as well as his pecuniary resources, but still scribbling bad verses and maxims on the model of Rochefoucauld. Pope had a very excusable, perhaps we may say creditable, enthusiasm for the acknowledged representatives of literary glory. Before he was twelve years old he had persuaded some one to take him to Will's, that he might have a sight of the venerable Dryden; and in the first published letter[1] to Wycherley he refers to this brief glimpse, and warmly thanks Wycherley for some conversation about the elder poet. And thus, when he came to know Wycherley, he was enraptured with the honour. He followed the great man about, as he tells us, like a dog; and, doubtless, received with profound respect the anecdotes of literary life which fell from the old gentleman's lips. Soon a correspondence began, in which Pope adopts a less jaunty air than that of his letters to Cromwell, but which is conducted on both sides in the laboured complimentary style which was not unnatural in the days when Congreve's comedy was taken to represent the conversation of fashionable life. Presently, however, the letters began to turn upon an obviously dangerous topic. Pope was only seventeen when it occurred to his friend to turn him to account as a literary assistant. The lad had already shown considerable powers of versification, and was soon employing them in the revision of some of the numerous composi-

[1] The letter is, unluckily, of doubtful authenticity; but it represents Pope's probable sentiments.

tions which amused Wycherley's leisure. It would have required, one might have thought, less than Wycherley's experience to foresee the natural end of such an alliance. Pope, in fact, set to work with great vigour in his favourite occupation of correcting. He hacked and hewed right and left; omitted, compressed, rearranged, and occasionally inserted additions of his own devising. Wycherley's memory had been enfeebled by illness, and now played him strange tricks. He was in the habit of reading himself to sleep with Montaigne, Rochefoucauld, and Racine. Next morning he would, with entire unconsciousness, write down as his own the thoughts of his author, or repeat almost word for word some previous composition of his own. To remove such repetitions thoroughly would require a very free application of the knife, and Pope would not be slow to discover that he was wasting talents fit for original work in botching and tinkering a mass of rubbish.

Any man of ripe years would have predicted the obvious consequences; and, according to the ordinary story, those consequences followed. Pope became more plain-speaking, and at last almost insulting in his language. Wycherley ended by demanding the return of his manuscripts, in a letter showing his annoyance under a veil of civility; and Pope sent them back with a smart reply, recommending Wycherley to adopt a previous suggestion and turn his poetry into maxims after the manner of Rochefoucauld. The "old scribbler," says Johnson, "was angry to see his pages defaced, and felt more pain from the criticism than content from the amendment of his faults." The story is told at length, and with his usual brilliance, by Macaulay, and has hitherto passed muster with all Pope's biographers; and, indeed, it is so natural

a story, and is so far confirmed by other statements of Pope, that it seems a pity to spoil it. And yet it must be at least modified, for we have already reached one of those perplexities which force a biographer of Pope to be constantly looking to his footsteps. So numerous are the contradictions which surround almost every incident of the poet's career, that one is constantly in danger of stumbling into some pitfall, or bound to cross it in gingerly fashion on the stepping-stone of a cautious "perhaps." The letters which are the authority for this story have undergone a manipulation from Pope himself, under circumstances to be hereafter noticed; and recent researches have shown that a very false colouring has been put upon this as upon other passages. The nature of this strange perversion is a curious illustration of Pope's absorbing vanity.

Pope, in fact, was evidently ashamed of the attitude which he had not unnaturally adopted to his correspondent. The first man of letters of his day could not bear to reveal the full degree in which he had fawned upon the decayed dramatist, whose inferiority to himself was now plainly recognized. He altered the whole tone of the correspondence by omission, and still worse by addition. He did not publish a letter in which Wycherley gently remonstrates with his young admirer for excessive adulation; he omitted from his own letters the phrase which had provoked the remonstrance; and, with more daring falsification, he manufactured an imaginary letter to Wycherley out of a letter really addressed to his friend Caryll. In this letter Pope had himself addressed to Caryll a remonstrance similar to that which he had received from Wycherley. When published as a letter to Wycherley, it gives the impression that Pope, at the age of seventeen, was al-

ready rejecting excessive compliments addressed to him by his experienced friend. By these audacious perversions of the truth, Pope is enabled to heighten his youthful independence, and to represent himself as already exhibiting a graceful superiority to the reception or the offering of incense; whilst he thus precisely inverts the relation which really existed between himself and his correspondent.

The letters, again, when read with a due attention to dates, shows that Wycherley's proneness to take offence has at least been exaggerated. Pope's services to Wycherley were rendered on two separate occasions. The first set of poems were corrected during 1706 and 1707; and Wycherley, in speaking of this revision, far from showing symptoms of annoyance, speaks with gratitude of Pope's kindness, and returns the expressions of good-will which accompanied his criticisms. Both these expressions, and Wycherley's acknowledgment of them, were omitted in Pope's publication. More than two years elapsed, when (in April, 1710) Wycherley submitted a new set of manuscripts to Pope's unflinching severity; and it is from the letters which passed in regard to this last batch that the general impression as to the nature of the quarrel has been derived. But these letters, again, have been mutilated, and so mutilated as to increase the apparent tartness of the mutual retorts; and it must therefore remain doubtful how far the coolness which ensued was really due to the cause assigned. Pope, writing at the time to Cromwell, expresses his vexation at the difference, and professes himself unable to account for it, though he thinks that his corrections may have been the cause of the rupture. An alternative rumour,[1] it seems, accused Pope of having written some

[1] See Elwin's Pope, vol. i., cxxxv.

satirical verses upon his friend. To discover the rights and wrongs of the quarrel is now impossible, though, unfortunately, one thing is clear, namely, that Pope was guilty of grossly sacrificing truth in the interests of his own vanity. We may, indeed, assume, without much risk of error, that Pope had become too conscious of his own importance to find pleasure or pride in doctoring another man's verses. It must remain uncertain how far he showed this resentment to Wycherley openly, or gratified it by some covert means; and how far, again, he succeeded in calming Wycherley's susceptibility by his compliments, or aroused his wrath by more or less contemptuous treatment of his verses.

A year after the quarrel, Cromwell reported that Wycherley had again been speaking in friendly terms of Pope, and Pope expressed his pleasure with eagerness. He must, he said, be more agreeable to himself when agreeable to Wycherley, as the earth was brighter when the sun was less overcast. Wycherley, it may be remarked, took Pope's advice by turning some of his verses into prose maxims; and they seem to have been at last upon more or less friendly terms. The final scene of Wycherley's questionable career, some four years later, is given by Pope in a letter to his friend, Edward Blount. The old man, he says, joined the sacraments of marriage and extreme unction. By one he supposed himself to gain some advantage of his soul; by the other, he had the pleasure of saddling his hated heir and nephew with the jointure of his widow. When dying, he begged his wife to grant him a last request, and, upon her consent, explained it to be that she would never again marry an old man. Sickness, says Pope in comment, often destroys wit and wisdom, but has seldom the power to remove humour. Wycherley's joke, re-

plies a critic, is contemptible; and yet one feels that the death scene, with this strange mixture of cynicism, spite, and superstition, half redeemed by imperturbable good temper, would not be unworthy of a place in Wycherley's own school of comedy. One could wish that Pope had shown a little more perception of the tragic side of such a conclusion.

Pope was still almost a boy when he broke with Wycherley; but he was already beginning to attract attention, and within a surprisingly short time he was becoming known as one of the first writers of the day. I must now turn to the poems by which this reputation was gained, and the incidents connected with their publication. In Pope's life, almost more than in that of any other poet, the history of the author is the history of the man.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST PERIOD OF POPE'S LITERARY CAREER.

Pope's rupture with Wycherley took place in the summer of 1710, when Pope, therefore, was just twenty-two. He was at this time only known as the contributor of some small poems to a Miscellany. Three years afterwards (1713) he was receiving such patronage in his great undertaking, the translation of Homer, as to prove conclusively that he was regarded by the leaders of literature as a poet of very high promise; and two years later (1715) the appearance of the first volume of his translation entitled him to rank as the first poet of the day. So rapid a rise to fame has had few parallels, and was certainly not approached until Byron woke and found himself famous at twenty-four. Pope was eager for the praise of remarkable precocity, and was weak and insincere enough to alter the dates of some of his writings in order to strengthen his claim. Yet, even when we accept the corrected accounts of recent enquirers, there is no doubt that he gave proofs at a very early age of an extraordinary command of the resources of his art. It is still more evident that his merits were promptly and frankly recognized by his contemporaries. Great men and distinguished authors held out friendly hands to him; and he never had to undergo, even for a brief period, the dreary ordeal of neglect through

which men of loftier but less popular genius, have been so often compelled to pass. And yet it unfortunately happened that, even in this early time, when success followed success, and the young man's irritable nerves might well have been soothed by the general chorus of admiration, he excited and returned bitter antipathies, some of which lasted through his life.

Pope's works belong to three distinct periods. The translation of Homer was the great work of the middle period of his life. In his later years he wrote the moral and satirical poems by which he is now best known. The earlier period, with which I have now to deal, was one of experimental excursions into various fields of poetry, with varying success and rather uncertain aim. Pope had already, as we have seen, gone through the process of "filling his basket." He had written the epic poem which happily found its way into the flames. He had translated many passages that struck his fancy in the classics, especially considerable fragments of Ovid and Statius. Following Dryden, he had turned some of Chaucer into modern English; and, adopting a fashion which had not as yet quite died of inanition, he had composed certain pastorals in the manner of Theocritus and Virgil. These early productions had been written under the eye of Trumbull; they had been handed about in manuscript; Wycherley, as already noticed, had shown them to Walsh, himself an offender of the same class. Granville, afterwards Lord Lansdowne, another small poet, read them, and professed to see in Pope another Virgil; whilst Congreve, Garth, Somers, Halifax, and other men of weight condescended to read, admire, and criticise. Old Tonson, who had published for Dryden, wrote a polite note to Pope, then only seventeen, saying that he had seen one of the

Pastorals in the hands of Congreve and Walsh, "which was extremely fine," and requesting the honour of printing it. Three years afterwards it accordingly appeared in Tonson's Miscellany, a kind of annual, of which the first numbers had been edited by Dryden. Such miscellanies more or less discharged the function of a modern magazine. The plan, said Pope to Wycherley, is very useful to the poets, "who, like other thieves, escape by getting into a crowd." The volume contained contributions from Buckingham, Garth, and Rowe; it closed with Pope's Pastorals, and opened with another set of pastorals by Ambrose Philips—a combination which, as we shall see, led to one of Pope's first quarrels.

The Pastorals have been seriously criticised; but they are, in truth, mere school-boy exercises; they represent nothing more than so many experiments in versification. The pastoral form had doubtless been used in earlier hands to embody true poetic feeling; but in Pope's time it had become hopelessly threadbare. The fine gentlemen in wigs and laced coats amused themselves by writing about nymphs and "conscious swains," by way of asserting their claims to elegance of taste. Pope, as a boy, took the matter seriously, and always retained a natural fondness for a juvenile performance upon which he had expended great labour, and which was the chief proof of his extreme precocity. He invites attention to his own merits, and claims especially the virtue of propriety. He does not, he tells us, like some other people, make his roses and daffodils bloom in the same season, and cause his nightingales to sing in November; and he takes particular credit for having remembered that there were no wolves in England, and having accordingly excised a passage in which Alexis prophesied that those animals would grow milder as they

listened to the strains of his favourite nymph. When a man has got so far as to bring to England all the pagan deities, and rival shepherds contending for bowls and lambs in alternate strophes, these niceties seem a little out of place. After swallowing such a camel of an anachronism as is contained in the following lines, it is ridiculous to pride oneself upon straining at a gnat:—

Inspire me, says Strephon,

> "Inspire me, Phœbus, in my Delia's praise
> With Waller's strains or Granville's moving lays.
> A milk-white bull shall at your altars stand,
> That threats a fight, and spurns the rising sand."

Granville would certainly not have felt more surprised at meeting a wolf than at seeing a milk-white bull sacrificed to Phœbus on the banks of the Thames. It would be a more serious complaint that Pope, who can thus admit anachronisms as daring as any of those which provoked Johnson in Lycidas, shows none of that exquisite feeling for rural scenery which is one of the superlative charms of Milton's early poems. Though country-bred, he talks about country sights and sounds as if he had been brought up at Christ's Hospital, and read of them only in Virgil. But, in truth, it is absurd to dwell upon such points. The sole point worth notice in the Pastorals is the general sweetness of the versification. Many corrections show how carefully Pope had elaborated these early lines, and by what patient toil he was acquiring the peculiar qualities of style in which he was to become pre-eminent. We may agree with Johnson that Pope performing upon a pastoral pipe is rather a ludicrous person, but for mere practice even nonsense verses have been found useful.

The young gentleman was soon to give a far more char-

acteristic specimen of his peculiar powers. Poets, according to the ordinary rule, should begin by exuberant fancy, and learn to prune and refine as the reasoning faculties develope. But Pope was from the first a conscious and deliberate artist. He had read the fashionable critics of his time, and had accepted their canons as an embodiment of irrefragable reason. His head was full of maxims, some of which strike us as palpable truisms, and others as typical specimens of wooden pedantry. Dryden had set the example of looking upon the French critics as authoritative lawgivers in poetry. Boileau's art of poetry was carefully studied, as bits of it were judiciously appropriated, by Pope. Another authority was the great Bossu, who wrote in 1675 a treatise on epic poetry; and the modern reader may best judge of the doctrines characteristic of the school by the naïve pedantry with which Addison, the typical man of taste of his time, invokes the authority of Bossu and Aristotle, in his exposition of Paradise Lost.[1] English writers were treading in the steps of Boileau and Horace. Roscommon selected for a poem the lively topic of "translated verse;" and Sheffield had written with Dryden an essay upon satire, and afterwards a more elaborate essay upon poetry. To these masterpieces, said Addison, another masterpiece was now added by Pope's Essay upon Criticism. Not only did Addison applaud, but later critics have spoken of their wonder at the penetration, learning, and taste exhibited by so young a man. The essay was carefully finished. Written apparently in 1709, it was published in 1711. This was as short a time, said Pope to Spence, as he ever let anything of his lie by him; he no doubt em-

[1] Any poet who followed Bossu's rules, said Voltaire, might be certain that no one would read him; happily it was impossible to follow them.

ployed it, according to his custom, in correcting and revising, and he had prepared himself by carefully digesting the whole in prose. It is, however, written without any elaborate logical plan, though it is quite sufficiently coherent for its purpose. The maxims on which Pope chiefly dwells are, for the most part, the obvious rules which have been the common property of all generations of critics. One would scarcely ask for originality in such a case, any more than one would desire a writer on ethics to invent new laws of morality. We require neither Pope nor Aristotle to tell us that critics should not be pert nor prejudiced; that fancy should be regulated by judgment; that apparent facility comes by long training; that the sound should have some conformity to the meaning; that genius is often envied; and that dulness is frequently beyond the reach of reproof. We might even guess, without the authority of Pope, backed by Bacon, that there are some beauties which cannot be taught by method, but must be reached "by a kind of felicity." It is not the less interesting to notice Pope's skill in polishing these rather rusty sayings into the appearance of novelty. In a familiar line Pope gives us the view which he would himself apply in such cases.

> "True wit is nature to advantage dress'd,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd."

The only fair question, in short, is whether Pope has managed to give a lasting form to some of the floating commonplaces which have more or less suggested themselves to every writer. If we apply this test, we must admit that if the essay upon criticism does not show deep thought, it shows singular skill in putting old truths. Pope undeniably succeeded in hitting off many phrases of marked felicity. He already showed the power, in

which he was probably unequalled, of coining aphorisms out of commonplace. Few people read the essay now, but everybody is aware that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," and has heard the warning—

> "A little learning is a dangerous thing,
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:"

maxims which may not commend themselves as strictly accurate to a scientific reasoner, but which have as much truth as one can demand from an epigram. And besides many sayings which share in some degree their merit, there are occasional passages which rise, at least, to the height of graceful rhetoric if they are scarcely to be called poetical. One simile was long famous, and was called by Johnson the best in the language. It is that in which the sanguine youth, overwhelmed by a growing perception of the boundlessness of possible attainments, is compared to the traveller crossing the mountains, and seeing—

> "Hills peep o'er hills and Alps on Alps arise."

The poor simile is pretty well forgotten, but is really a good specimen of Pope's brilliant declamation.

The essay, however, is not uniformly polished. Between the happier passages we have to cross stretches of flat prose twisted into rhyme; Pope seems to have intentionally pitched his style at a prosaic level as fitter for didactic purposes; but besides this we here and there come upon phrases which are not only elliptical and slovenly, but defy all grammatical construction. This was a blemish to which Pope was always strangely liable. It was perhaps due in part to over-correction, when the context was forgotten and the subject had lost its freshness. Critics, again, have remarked upon the poverty of the

rhymes, and observed that he makes ten rhymes to "wit" and twelve to "sense." The frequent recurrence of the words is the more awkward because they are curiously ambiguous. "Wit" was beginning to receive its modern meaning; but Pope uses it vaguely as sometimes equivalent to intelligence in general, sometimes to the poetic faculty, and sometimes to the erratic fancy, which the true poet restrains by sense. Pope would have been still more puzzled if asked to define precisely what he meant by the antithesis between nature and art. They are somehow opposed, yet art turns out to be only "nature methodized." We have, indeed, a clue for our guidance; to study nature, we are told, is the same thing as to study Homer, and Homer should be read day and night, with Virgil for a comment and Aristotle for an expositor. Nature, good sense, Homer, Virgil, and the Stagyrite all, it seems, come to much the same thing.

It would be very easy to pick holes in this very loose theory. But it is better to try to understand the point of view indicated; for, in truth, Pope is really stating the assumptions which guided his whole career. No one will accept his position at the present time; but any one who is incapable of, at least, a provisional sympathy, may as well throw Pope aside at once, and with Pope most contemporary literature.

The dominant figure in Pope's day was the Wit. The wit — taken personally — was the man who represented what we now describe by culture or the spirit of the age. Bright, clear, common sense was for once having its own way, and tyrannizing over the faculties from which it too often suffers violence. The favoured faculty never doubted its own qualification for supremacy in every department. In metaphysics it was triumphing

with Hobbes and Locke over the remnants of scholasticism; under Tillotson, it was expelling mystery from religion; and in art it was declaring war against the extravagant, the romantic, the mystic, and the Gothic—a word then used as a simple term of abuse. Wit and sense are but different avatars of the same spirit; wit was the form in which it showed itself in coffee-houses, and sense that in which it appeared in the pulpit or parliament. When Walsh told Pope to be correct, he was virtually advising him to carry the same spirit into poetry. The classicism of the time was the natural corollary; for the classical models were the historical symbols of the movement which Pope represented. He states his view very tersely in the essay. Classical culture had been overwhelmed by the barbarians, and the monks "finished what the Goths began." Letters revived when the study of classical models again gave an impulse and supplied a guidance.

> "At length Erasmus, that great injured name,
> The glory of the priesthood and their shame,
> Stemm'd the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
> And drove these holy Vandals off the stage."

The classicalism of Pope's time was no doubt very different from that of the period of Erasmus; but in his view it differed only because the contemporaries of Dryden had more thoroughly dispersed the mists of the barbarism which still obscured the Shakspearean age, and from which even Milton or Cowley had not completely escaped. Dryden and Boileau and the French critics, with their interpreters, Roscommon, Sheffield, and Walsh, who found rules in Aristotle, and drew their precedents from Homer, were at last stating the pure canons of unadulterated sense. To this school wit, and sense, and nat-

ure, and the classics, all meant pretty much the same. That was pronounced to be unnatural which was too silly, or too far-fetched, or too exalted, to approve itself to the good sense of a wit; and the very incarnation and eternal type of good sense and nature was to be found in the classics. The test of thorough polish and refinement was the power of ornamenting a speech with an appropriate phrase from Horace or Virgil, or prefixing a Greek motto to an essay in the *Spectator*. If it was necessary to give to any utterance an air of philosophical authority, a reference to Longinus or Aristotle was the natural device. Perhaps the acquaintance with classics might not be very profound; but the classics supplied at least a convenient symbol for the spirit which had triumphed against Gothic barbarism and scholastic pedantry.

Even the priggish wits of that day were capable of being bored by didactic poetry, and especially by such didactic poetry as resolved itself too easily into a string of maxims not more poetical in substance than the immortal "'Tis a sin to steal a pin." The essay—published anonymously—did not make any rapid success till Pope sent round copies to well-known critics. Addison's praise and Dennis's abuse helped, as we shall presently see, to give it notoriety. Pope, however, returned from criticism to poetry, and his next performance was in some degree a fresh, but far less puerile, performance upon the pastoral pipe.[1] Nothing could be more natural than for the young poet to take for a text the forest in which he lived. Dull as the natives might be, their dwelling-place was historical,

[1] There is the usual contradiction as to the date of composition of *Windsor Forest*. Part seems to have been written early (Pope says 1704), and part certainly not before 1712.

and there was an excellent precedent for such a performance. Pope, as we have seen, was familiar with Milton's juvenile poems; but such works as the Allegro and Penseroso were too full of the genuine country spirit to suit his probable audience. Wycherley, whom he frequently invited to come to Binfield, would undoubtedly have found Milton a bore. But Sir John Denham, a thoroughly masculine, if not, as Pope calls him, a majestic poet, was a guide whom the Wycherleys would respect. His *Cooper's Hill* (in 1642) was the first example of what Johnson calls local poetry—poetry, that is, devoted to the celebration of a particular place; and, moreover, it was one of the early models of the rhythm which became triumphant in the hands of Dryden. One couplet is still familiar:

> "Though deep, yet clear; though gentle, yet not dull;
> Strong without rage; without o'erflowing, full."

The poem has some vigorous descriptive touches, but is in the main a forcible expression of the moral and political reflections which would be approved by the admirers of good sense in poetry.

Pope's *Windsor Forest*, which appeared in the beginning of 1713, is closely and avowedly modelled upon this original. There is still a considerable infusion of the puerile classicism of the Pastorals, which contrasts awkwardly with Denham's strength, and a silly episode about the nymph Lodona changed into the river Loddon by Diana, to save her from the pursuit of Pan. But the style is animated, and the descriptions, though seldom original, show Pope's frequent felicity of language. Wordsworth, indeed, was pleased to say that Pope had here introduced almost the only "new images of internal nature" to be

found between Milton and Thomson. Probably the good Wordsworth was wishing to do a little bit of excessive candour. Pope will not introduce his scenery without a turn suited to the taste of the town:—

> "Here waving groves a chequer'd scene display,
> And part admit and part exclude the day;
> As some coy nymph her lover's fond address,
> Nor quite indulges nor can quite repress."

He has some well-turned lines upon the sports of the forest, though they are clearly not the lines of a sportsman. They betray something of the sensitive lad's shrinking from the rough squires whose only literature consisted of Durfey's songs, and who would have heartily laughed at his sympathy for a dying pheasant. I may observe in passing that Pope always showed the true poet's tenderness for the lower animals, and disgust at bloodshed. He loved his dog, and said that he would have inscribed over his grave, "O rare Bounce," but for the appearance of ridiculing "rare Ben Jonson." He spoke with horror of a contemporary dissector of live dogs, and the pleasantest of his papers in the *Guardian* is a warm remonstrance against cruelty to animals. He "dares not" attack hunting, he says—and, indeed, such an attack requires some courage even at the present day—but he evidently has no sympathy with huntsmen, and has to borrow his description from Statius, which was hardly the way to get the true local colour. *Windsor Forest*, however, like *Cooper's Hill*, speedily diverges into historical and political reflections. The barbarity of the old forest laws, the poets Denham and Cowley and Surrey, who had sung on the banks of the Thames, and the heroes who made Windsor illustrious, suggest obvious thoughts, put into verses often brilliant,

though sometimes affected, varied by a compliment to Trumbull and an excessive eulogy of Granville, to whom the poem is inscribed. The whole is skilfully adapted to the time by a brilliant eulogy upon the peace which was concluded just as the poem was published. The Whig poet Tickell, soon to be Pope's rival, was celebrating the same "lofty theme" on his "artless reed," and introducing a pretty little compliment to Pope. To readers who have lost the taste for poetry of this class one poem may seem about as good as the other; but Pope's superiority is plain enough to a reader who will condescend to distinguish. His verses are an excellent specimen of his declamatory style—polished, epigrammatic, and well expressed; and, though keeping far below the regions of true poetry, preserving just that level which would commend them to the literary statesmen and the politicians at Will's and Button's. Perhaps some advocate of Free Trade might try upon a modern audience the lines in which Pope expresses his aspiration in a foot-note that London may one day become a "Free Port." There is at least not one antiquated or obscure phrase in the whole. Here are half a dozen lines:—

> "The time shall come, when, free as seas and wind,
> Unbounded Thames shall flow for all mankind,
> Whole nations enter with each swelling tide,
> And seas but join the regions they divide;
> Earth's distant ends our glory shall behold,
> And the new world launch forth to seek the old."

In the next few years Pope found other themes for the display of his declamatory powers. Of the *Temple of Fame* (1715), a frigid imitation of Chaucer, I need only say that it is one of Pope's least successful performances; but I must notice more fully two rhetorical poems which

appeared in 1717. These were the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* and the *Eloisa to Abelard*. Both poems, and especially the last, have received the warmest praises from Pope's critics, and even from critics who were most opposed to his school. They are, in fact, his chief performances of the sentimental kind. Written in his youth, and yet when his powers of versification had reached their fullest maturity, they represent an element generally absent from his poetry. Pope was at the period in which, if ever, a poet should sing of love, and in which we expect the richest glow and fervour of youthful imagination. Pope was neither a Burns, nor a Byron, nor a Keats; but here, if anywhere, we should find those qualities in which he has most affinity to the poets of passion or of sensuous emotion, not soured by experience or purified by reflection. The motives of the two poems were skilfully chosen. Pope—as has already appeared to some extent—was rarely original in his designs; he liked to have the outlines at least drawn for him, to be filled with his own colouring. The *Eloisa to Abelard* was founded upon a translation from the French, published in 1714 by Hughes (author of the *Siege of Damascus*), which is itself a manipulated translation from the famous Latin originals. Pope, it appears, kept very closely to the words of the English translation, and in some places has done little more than versify the prose, though, of course, it is compressed, rearranged, and modified. The *Unfortunate Lady* has been the cause of a good deal of controversy. Pope's elegy implies, vaguely enough, that she had been cruelly treated by her guardians, and had committed suicide in some foreign country. The verses, as commentators decided, showed such genuine feeling, that the story narrated in them must have been authentic, and one of his own

correspondents (Caryll) begged him for an explanation of the facts. Pope gave no answer, but left a posthumous note to an edition of his letters calculated, perhaps intended, to mystify future inquirers. The lady, a Mrs. Weston, to whom the note pointed, did not die till 1724, and could therefore not have committed suicide in 1717. The mystification was childish enough, though, if Pope had committed no worse crime of the kind, one would not consider him to be a very grievous offender. The inquiries of Mr. Dilke, who cleared up this puzzle, show that there were, in fact, two ladies—Mrs. Weston and a Mrs. Cope—known to Pope about this time, both of whom suffered under some domestic persecution. Pope seems to have taken up their cause with energy, and sent money to Mrs. Cope when, at a later period, she was dying abroad in great distress. His zeal seems to have been sincere and generous, and it is possible enough that the elegy was a reflection of his feelings, though it suggested an imaginary state of facts. If this be so, the reference to the lady in his posthumous note contained some relation to the truth, though if taken too literally it would be misleading.

The poems themselves are, beyond all doubt, impressive compositions. They are vivid and admirably worked. "Here," says Johnson of the *Eloisa to Abelard*, the most important of the two, "is particularly observable the *curiosa felicitas*, a fruitful soil and careful cultivation. Here is no crudeness of sense, nor asperity of language." So far there can be no dispute. The style has the highest degree of technical perfection, and it is generally added that the poems are as pathetic as they are exquisitely written. Bowles, no hearty lover of Pope, declared the *Eloisa* to be "infinitely superior to everything of the kind, ancient or modern." The tears shed, says Hazlitt of the same poem,

"are drops gushing from the heart; the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love." And De Quincey ends an eloquent criticism by declaring that the "lyrical tumult of the changes, the hope, the tears, the rapture, the penitence, the despair, place the reader in tumultuous sympathy with the poor distracted nun." The pathos of the *Unfortunate Lady* has been almost equally praised, and I may quote from it a famous passage which Mackintosh repeated with emotion to repel a charge of coldness brought against Pope:—

> "By foreign hands thy dying eyes were closed,
> By foreign hands thy decent limbs composed,
> By foreign hands thy humble grave adorn'd,
> By strangers honour'd and by strangers mourn'd!
> What though no friends in sable weeds appear,
> Grieve for an hour, perhaps, then mourn a year,
> And bear about the mockery of woe
> To midnight dances and the public show?
> What though no weeping loves thy ashes grace,
> Nor polish'd marble emulate thy face?
> What though no sacred earth allow thee room,
> Nor hallow'd dirge be mutter'd o'er thy tomb?
> Yet shall thy grave with rising flowers be dress'd,
> And the green turf lie lightly on thy breast;
> There shall the morn her earliest tears bestow,
> There the first roses of the year shall blow;
> While angels with their silver wings o'ershade
> The ground, now sacred by thy reliques made."

The more elaborate poetry of the *Eloisa* is equally polished throughout, and too much praise cannot easily be bestowed upon the skill with which the romantic scenery of the convent is indicated in the background, and the force with which Pope has given the revulsions of feeling of his unfortunate heroine from earthly to heavenly love, and

from keen remorse to renewed gusts of overpowering passion. All this may be said, and without opposing high critical authority. And yet, I must also say, whether with or without authority, that I, at least, can read the poems without the least "disposition to cry," and that a single pathetic touch of Cowper or Wordsworth strikes incomparably deeper. And if I seek for a reason, it seems to be simply that Pope never crosses the undefinable, but yet ineffaceable, line which separates true poetry from rhetoric. The *Eloisa* ends rather flatly by one of Pope's characteristic aphorisms. "He best can paint them (the woes, that is, of Eloisa) who shall feel them most;" and it is characteristic, by the way, that even in these his most impassioned verses, the lines which one remembers are of the same epigrammatic stamp, *e. g.:*

> "A heap of dust alone remains of thee,
> 'Tis all thou art and all the proud shall be!
>
> "I mourn the lover, not lament the fault.
>
> "How happy is the blameless vestal's lot,
> The world forgetting, by the world forgot."

The worker in moral aphorisms cannot forget himself even in the full swing of his fervid declamation. I have no doubt that Pope so far exemplified his own doctrine that he truly felt whilst he was writing. His feelings make him eloquent, but they do not enable him to "snatch a grace beyond the reach of art," to blind us for a moment to the presence of the consummate workman, judiciously blending his colours, heightening his effects, and skilfully managing his transitions or consciously introducing an abrupt outburst of a new mood. The smoothness of the verses imposes monotony even upon the varying passions which are supposed to struggle in Eloisa's breast. It is

not merely our knowledge that Pope is speaking dramatically which prevents us from receiving the same kind of impressions as we receive from poetry—such, for example, as some of Cowper's minor pieces—into which we know that a man is really putting his whole heart. The comparison would not be fair, for in such cases we are moved by knowledge of external facts as well as by the poetic power. But it is simply that Pope always resembles an orator whose gestures are studied, and who thinks, while he is speaking, of the fall of his robes and the attitude of his hands. He is throughout academical; and though knowing with admirable nicety how grief should be represented, and what have been the expedients of his best predecessors, he misses the one essential touch of spontaneous impulse.

One other blemish is perhaps more fatal to the popularity of the *Eloisa*. There is a taint of something unwholesome and effeminate. Pope, it is true, is only following the language of the original in the most offensive passages; but we see too plainly that he has dwelt too fondly upon those passages, and worked them up with especial care. We need not be prudish in our judgment of impassioned poetry; but when the passion has this false ring, the ethical coincides with the æsthetic objection.

I have mentioned these poems here, because they seem to be the development of the rhetorical vein which appeared in the earlier work. But I have passed over another work which has sometimes been regarded as his masterpiece. A Lord Petre had offended a Miss Fermor by stealing a lock of her hair. She thought that he showed more gallantry than courtesy, and some unpleasant feeling resulted between the families. Pope's friend, Caryll, thought that it might be appeased if the young

poet would turn the whole affair into friendly ridicule. Nobody, it might well be supposed, had a more dexterous touch; and a brilliant trifle from his hands, just fitted for the atmosphere of drawing-rooms, would be a convenient peace-offering, and was the very thing in which he might be expected to succeed. Pope accordingly set to work at a dainty little mock-heroic, in which he describes, in playful mockery of the conventional style, the fatal coffee-drinking at Hampton, in which the too daring peer appropriated the lock. The poem received the praise which it well deserved; for certainly the young poet had executed his task to a nicety. No more brilliant, sparkling, vivacious trifle is to be found in our literature than the *Rape of the Lock*, even in this early form. Pope received permission from the lady to publish it in *Lintot's Miscellany* in 1712, and a wider circle admired it, though it seems that the lady and her family began to think that young Mr. Pope was making rather too free with her name. Pope meanwhile, animated by his success, hit upon a singularly happy conception, by which he thought that the poem might be rendered more important. The solid critics of those days were much occupied with the machinery of epic poems; the machinery being composed of the gods and goddesses who, from the days of Homer, had attended to the fortunes of heroes. He had hit upon a curious French book, the *Comte de Gabalis*, which professes to reveal the mysteries of the Rosicrucians, and it occurred to him that the elemental sylphs and gnomes would serve his purpose admirably. He spoke of his new device to Addison, who administered—and there is not the slightest reason for doubting his perfect sincerity and good meaning—a little dose of cold water. The poem, as it stood, was a "delicious little thing"—*merum sal*—

and it would be a pity to alter it. Pope, however, adhered to his plan, made a splendid success, and thought that Addison must have been prompted by some mean motive. The *Rape of the Lock* appeared in its new form, with sylphs and gnomes, and an ingenious account of a game at cards and other improvements, in 1714. Pope declared, and critics have agreed, that he never showed more skill than in the remodelling of this poem; and it has ever since held a kind of recognized supremacy amongst the productions of the drawing-room muse.

The reader must remember that the so-called heroic style of Pope's period is now hopelessly effete. No human being would care about machinery and the rules of Bossu, or read without utter weariness the mechanical imitations of Homer and Virgil which were occasionally attempted by the Blackmores and other less ponderous versifiers. The shadow grows dim with the substance. The burlesque loses its point when we care nothing for the original; and, so far, Pope's bit of filigree-work, as Hazlitt calls it, has become tarnished. The very mention of beaux and belles suggests the kind of feeling with which we disinter fragments of old-world finery from the depths of an ancient cabinet, and even the wit is apt to sound wearisome. And further, it must be allowed to some hostile critics that Pope has a worse defect. The poem is, in effect, a satire upon feminine frivolity. It continues the strain of mockery against hoops and patches and their wearers, which supplied Addison and his colleagues with the materials of so many *Spectators*. I think that even in Addison there is something which rather jars upon us. His persiflage is full of humour and kindliness, but underlying it there is a tone of superiority to women which is sometimes offensive. It is taken for granted that a wom-

an is a fool, or at least should be flattered if any man condescends to talk sense to her. With Pope this tone becomes harsher, and the merciless satirist begins to show himself. In truth, Pope can be inimitably pungent, but he can never be simply playful. Addison was too condescending with his pretty pupils; but under Pope's courtesy there lurks contempt, and his smile has a disagreeable likeness to a sneer. If Addison's manner sometimes suggests the blandness of a don who classes women with the inferior beings unworthy of the Latin grammar, Pope suggests the brilliant wit whose contempt has a keener edge from his resentment against fine ladies blinded to his genius by his personal deformity.

Even in his dedication, Pope, with unconscious impertinence, insults his heroine for her presumable ignorance of his critical jargon. His smart epigrams want but a slight change of tone to become satire. It is the same writer who begins an essay on women's characters by telling a woman that her sex is a compound of

> "Matter too soft a lasting mask to bear;
> And best distinguished by black, brown, or fair,"

and communicates to her the pleasant truth that

> "Every woman is at heart a rake."

Women, in short, are all frivolous beings, whose one genuine interest is in love-making. The same sentiment is really implied in the more playful lines in the *Rape of the Lock*. The sylphs are warned by omens that some misfortune impends; but they don't know what.

> "Whether the nymph shall break Diana's law,
> Or some frail china jar receive a flaw;
> Or stain her honour or her new brocade,
> Forget her prayers or miss a masquerade;

Or lose her heart or necklace at a ball,
Or whether heaven has doom'd that Shock must fall."

We can understand that Miss Fermor would feel such raillery to be equivocal. It may be added, that an equal want of delicacy is implied in the mock-heroic battle at the end, where the ladies are gifted with an excess of screaming power:—

"'Restore the lock!' she cries, and all around
'Restore the lock,' the vaulted roofs rebound—
Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain
Roar'd for the handkerchief that caused his pain."

These faults, though far from trifling, are yet felt only as blemishes in the admirable beauty and brilliance of the poem. The successive scenes are given with so firm and clear a touch—there is such a sense of form, the language is such a dexterous elevation of the ordinary social twaddle into the mock-heroic, that it is impossible not to recognize a consummate artistic power. The dazzling display of true wit and fancy blinds us for the time to the want of that real tenderness and humour which would have softened some harsh passages, and given a more enduring charm to the poetry. It has, in short, the merit that belongs to any work of art which expresses in the most finished form the sentiment characteristic of a given social phase; one deficient in many of the most ennobling influences, but yet one in which the arts of converse represent a very high development of shrewd sense refined into vivid wit. And we may, I think, admit that there is some foundation for the genealogy that traces Pope's Ariel back to his more elevated ancestor in the *Tempest*. The later Ariel, indeed, is regarded as the soul of a coquette, and is almost an allegory of the spirit of poetic fancy in slavery to polished society.

"Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain
While clogg'd he beats his silken wings in vain."

Pope's Ariel is a parody of the ethereal being into whom Shakspeare had refined the ancient fairy; but it is a parody which still preserves a sense of the delicate and graceful. The ancient race, which appeared for the last time in this travesty of the fashion of Queen Anne, still showed some touch of its ancient beauty. Since that time no fairy has appeared without being hopelessly childish or affected.

Let us now turn from the poems to the author's personal career during the same period. In the remarkable autobiographic poem called the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, Pope speaks of his early patrons and friends, and adds—

"Soft were my numbers; who could take offence
When pure description held the place of sense?
Like gentle Fanny's was my flow'ry theme,
A painted mistress or a purling stream.
Yet then did Gildon draw his venal quill—
I wish'd the man a dinner, and sat still.
Yet then did Dennis rave in furious fret;
I never answer'd,—I was not in debt."

Pope's view of his own career suggests the curious problem: how it came to pass that so harmless a man should be the butt of so many hostilities? How could any man be angry with a writer of gentle pastorals and versified love-letters? The answer of Pope was, that this was the normal state of things. "The life of a wit," he says, in the preface to his works, "is a warfare upon earth;" and the warfare results from the hatred of men of genius natural to the dull. Had any one else made such a statement, Pope would have seen its resemblance to the complaint of the one reasonable juryman overpow-

ered by eleven obstinate fellows. But we may admit that an intensely sensitive nature is a bad qualification for a public career. A man who ventures into the throng of competitors without a skin will be tortured by every touch, and suffer the more if he turns to retaliate.

Pope's first literary performances had not been so harmless as he suggests. Amongst the minor men of letters of the day was the surly John Dennis. He was some thirty years Pope's senior; a writer of dreary tragedies which had gained a certain success by their Whiggish tendencies, and of ponderous disquisitions upon critical questions, not much cruder in substance though heavier in form than many utterances of Addison or Steele. He could, however, snarl out some shrewd things when provoked, and was known to the most famous wits of the day. He had corresponded with Dryden, Congreve, and Wycherley, and published some of their letters. Pope, it seems, had been introduced to him by Cromwell, but they had met only two or three times. When Pope had become ashamed of following Wycherley about like a dog, he would soon find out that a Dennis did not deserve the homage of a rising genius. Possibly Dennis had said something of Pope's Pastorals, and Pope had probably been a witness, perhaps more than a mere witness, to some passage of arms in which Dennis lost his temper. In mere youthful impertinence he introduced an offensive touch in the *Essay upon Criticism*. It would be well, he said, if critics could advise authors freely,—

> "But Appius reddens at each word you speak,
> And stares, tremendous, with a threatening eye,
> Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry."

The name Appius referred to Dennis's tragedy of *Ap-*

pius and Virginia, a piece now recollected solely by the fact that poor Dennis had invented some new thunder for the performance; and by his piteous complaint against the actors for afterwards "stealing his thunder," had started a proverbial expression. Pope's reference stung Dennis to the quick. He replied by a savage pamphlet, pulling Pope's essay to pieces, and hitting some real blots, but diverging into the coarsest personal abuse. Not content with saying in his preface that he was attacked with the utmost falsehood and calumny by a little affected hypocrite, who had nothing in his mouth but truth, candour, and good-nature, he reviled Pope for his personal defects; insinuated that he was a hunch-backed toad; declared that he was the very shape of the bow of the god of love; that he might be thankful that he was born a modern, for, had he been born of Greek parents, his life would have been no longer than that of one of his poems, namely, half a day; and that his outward form, however like a monkey's, could not deviate more from the average of humanity than his mind. These amenities gave Pope his first taste of good, savage, slashing abuse. The revenge was out of all proportion to the offence. Pope, at first, seemed to take the assault judiciously. He kept silence, and simply marked some of the faults exposed by Dennis for alteration. But the wound rankled, and when an opportunity presently offered itself, Pope struck savagely at his enemy. To show how this came to pass, I must rise from poor old Dennis to a more exalted literary sphere.

The literary world, in which Dryden had recently been, and Pope was soon to be, the most conspicuous figure, was for the present under the mild dictatorship of Addison. We know Addison as one of the most kindly and delicate of humourists, and we can perceive the gentleness

which made him one of the most charming of companions in a small society. His sense of the ludicrous saved him from the disagreeable ostentation of powers which were never applied to express bitterness of feeling or to edge angry satire. The reserve of his sensitive nature made access difficult, but he was so transparently modest and unassuming that his shyness was not, as is too often the case, mistaken for pride. It is easy to understand the posthumous affection which Macaulay has so eloquently expressed, and the contemporary popularity which, according to Swift, would have made people unwilling to refuse him had he asked to be king. And yet I think that one cannot read Addison's praises without a certain recalcitration, like that which one feels in the case of the model boy who wins all the prizes, including that for good conduct. It is hard to feel very enthusiastic about a virtue whose dictates coincide so precisely with the demands of decorum, and which leads by so easy a path to reputation and success. Popularity is more often significant of the tact which makes a man avoid giving offence, than of the warm impulses of a generous nature. A good man who mixes with the world ought to be hated, if not to hate. But, whatever we may say against his excessive goodness, Addison deserved and received universal esteem, which in some cases became enthusiastic. Foremost amongst his admirers was the warm-hearted, reckless, impetuous Steele, the typical Irishman; and amongst other members of his little senate — as Pope called it — were Ambrose Philips and Tickell, young men of letters and sound Whig politics, and more or less competitors of Pope in literature. When Pope was first becoming known in London the Whigs were out of power; Addison and his friends were generally to be found at Button's Coffee-house in the af-

ternoon, and were represented to the society of the time by the *Spectator*, which began in March, 1711, and appeared daily to the end of 1712. Naturally, the young Pope would be anxious to approach this famous clique, though his connexions lay, in the first instance, amongst the Jacobite and Catholic families. Steele, too, would be glad to welcome so promising a contributor to the *Spectator* and its successor, the *Guardian*.

Pope, we may therefore believe, was heartily delighted when, some months after Dennis's attack, a notice of his *Essay upon Criticism* appeared in the *Spectator*, December 20, 1711. The reviewer censured some attacks upon contemporaries—a reference obviously to the lines upon Dennis—which the author had admitted into his "very fine poem;" but there were compliments enough to overbalance this slight reproof. Pope wrote a letter of acknowledgment to Steele, overflowing with the sincerest gratitude of a young poet on his first recognition by a high authority. Steele, in reply, disclaimed the article, and promised to introduce Pope to its real author, the great Addison himself. It does not seem that the acquaintance thus opened with the Addisonians ripened very rapidly, or led to any considerable results. Pope, indeed, is said to have written some *Spectators*. He certainly sent to Steele his *Messiah*, a sacred eclogue in imitation of Virgil's *Pollio*. It appeared on May 14, 1712, and is one of Pope's dexterous pieces of workmanship, in which phrases from Isaiah are so strung together as to form a good imitation of the famous poem which was once supposed to entitle Virgil to some place among the inspired heralds of Christianity. Pope sent another letter or two to Steele, which look very much like intended contributions to the *Spectator*, and a short letter about Hadrian's verses to his soul, which ap-

peared in November, 1712. When, in 1713, the *Guardian* succeeded the *Spectator*, Pope was one of Steele's contributors, and a paper by him upon dedications appeared as the fourth number. He soon gave a more remarkable proof of his friendly relations with Addison.

It is probable that no first performance of a play upon the English stage ever excited so much interest as that of Addison's *Cato*. It was not only the work of the first man of letters of the day, but it had, or was taken to have, a certain political significance. "The time was come," says Johnson, "when those who affected to think liberty in danger, affected likewise to think that a stage-play might preserve it." Addison, after exhibiting more than the usual display of reluctance, prepared his play for representation, and it was undoubtedly taken to be in some sense a Whig manifesto. It was, therefore, remarkable that he should have applied to Pope for a prologue, though Pope's connexions were entirely of the anti-Whiggish kind, and a passage in *Windsor Forest*, his last new poem (it appeared in March, 1713), indicated pretty plainly a refusal to accept the Whig shibboleths. In the *Forest* he was enthusiastic for the peace, and sneered at the Revolution. Pope afterwards declared that Addison had disavowed all party intentions at the time, and he accused him of insincerity for afterwards taking credit (in a poetical dedication of *Cato*) for the services rendered by his play to the cause of liberty. Pope's assertion is worthless in any case where he could exalt his own character for consistency at another man's expense, but it is true that both parties were inclined to equivocate. It is, indeed, difficult to understand how, if any "stage-play could preserve liberty," such a play as *Cato* should do the work. The polished declamation is made up of the platitudes common to Whigs and Tories;

and Bolingbroke gave the cue to his own party when he presented fifty guineas to *Cato's* representatives for defending the cause of liberty so well against a perpetual dictator. The Whigs, said Pope, design a second present when they can contrive as good a saying. Bolingbroke was, of course, aiming at Marlborough, and his interpretation was intrinsically as plausible as any that could have been devised by his antagonists. Each side could adopt *Cato* as easily as rival sects can quote the Bible; and it seems possible that Addison may have suggested to Pope that nothing in *Cato* could really offend his principles. Addison, as Pope also tells us, thought the prologue ambiguous, and altered "Britons, *arise!*" to "Britons, *attend!*" lest the phrase should be thought to hint at a new revolution. Addison advised Pope about this time not to be content with the applause of "half the nation," and perhaps regarded him as one who, by the fact of his external position with regard to parties, would be a more appropriate sponsor for the play.

Whatever the intrinsic significance of *Cato*, circumstances gave it a political colour; and Pope, in a lively description of the first triumphant night to his friend Caryll, says, that as author of the successful and very spirited prologue, he was clapped into a Whig, sorely against his will, at every two lines. Shortly before, he had spoken in the warmest terms to the same correspondent of the admirable moral tendency of the work; and perhaps he had not realized the full party significance till he became conscious of the impression produced upon the audience. Not long afterwards (letter of June 12, 1713) we find him complaining that his connexion with Steele and the *Guardian* was giving offence to some honest Jacobites. Had they known the nature of the connexion, they need hardly have

grudged Steele his contributor. His next proceedings possibly suggested the piece of advice which Addison gave to Lady M. W. Montagu: "Leave Pope as soon as you can; he will certainly play you some devilish trick else."

His first trick was calculated to vex an editor's soul. Ambrose Philips, as I have said, had published certain pastorals in the same volume with Pope's. Philips, though he seems to have been less rewarded than most of his companions, was certainly accepted as an attached member of Addison's "little senate;" and that body was not more free than other mutual admiration societies from the desire to impose its own prejudices upon the public. When Philips's *Distressed Mother*, a close imitation of Racine's *Andromaque*, was preparing for the stage, the Spectator was taken by Will Honeycomb to a rehearsal (*Spectator*, January 31, 1712), and Sir Roger de Coverley himself attended one of the performances (*Ib.*, March 25), and was profoundly affected by its pathos. The last paper was of course by Addison, and is a real triumph of art as a most delicate application of humour to the slightly unworthy purpose of puffing a friend and disciple. Addison had again praised Philips's Pastorals in the *Spectator* (October 30, 1712); and amongst the early numbers of the *Guardian* were a short series of papers upon pastoral poetry, in which the fortunate Ambrose was again held up as a model, whilst no notice was taken of Pope's rival performance. Pope, one may believe, had a contempt for Philips, whose pastoral inanities, whether better or worse than his own, had not the excuse of being youthful productions. Philips has bequeathed to our language the phrase "Namby-pamby," imposed upon him by Henry Carey (author of *Sally in our Alley*, and the clever farce *Chrononhotontho-*

logos), and years after this he wrote a poem to Miss Pulteney in the nursery, beginning,—

"Dimply damsel, sweetly smiling,"

which may sufficiently interpret the meaning of his nickname. Pope's irritable vanity was vexed at the liberal praises bestowed on such a rival, and he revenged himself by an artifice more ingenious than scrupulous. He sent an anonymous article to Steele for the *Guardian*. It is a professed continuation of the previous papers on pastorals, and is ostensibly intended to remove the appearance of partiality arising from the omission of Pope's name. In the first paragraphs the design is sufficiently concealed to mislead an unwary reader into the belief that Philips is preferred to Pope; but the irony soon becomes transparent, and Philips's antiquated affectation is contrasted with the polish of Pope, who is said even to "deviate into downright poetry." Steele, it is said, was so far mystified as to ask Pope's permission to publish the criticism. Pope generously permitted, and, accordingly, Steele printed what he must soon have discovered to be a shrewd attack upon his old friend and ally. Some writers have found a difficulty in understanding how Steele could have so blundered. One might, perhaps, whisper in confidence to the discreet, that even editors are mortal, and that Steele was conceivably capable of the enormity of reading papers carelessly. Philips was furious, and hung up a birch in Button's Coffee-house, declaring that he would apply it to his tormentor should he ever show his nose in the room. As Philips was celebrated for skill with the sword, the mode of vengeance was certainly unmanly, and stung the soul of his adversary, always morbidly sensitive to all attacks, and especially to attacks upon his person. The hatred thus kin-

dled was never quenched, and breathes in some of Pope's bitterest lines.

If not a "devilish trick," this little performance was enough to make Pope's relations to the Addison set decidedly unpleasant. Addison is said (but the story is very improbable) to have enjoyed the joke. If so, a vexatious incident must have changed his view of Pope's pleasantries, though Pope professedly appeared as his defender. Poor old Thersites-Dennis published, during the summer, a very bitter attack upon Addison's *Cato*. He said afterwards—though, considering the relations of the men, some misunderstanding is probable—that Pope had indirectly instigated this attack through the bookseller, Lintot. If so, Pope must have deliberately contrived the trap for the unlucky Dennis; and, at any rate, he fell upon Dennis as soon as the trap was sprung. Though Dennis was a hot-headed Whig, he had quarrelled with Addison and Steele, and was probably jealous, as the author of tragedies intended, like *Cato*, to propagate Whig principles, perhaps to turn Whig prejudices to account. He writes with the bitterness of a disappointed and unlucky man, but he makes some very fair points against his enemy. Pope's retaliation took the form of an anonymous "Narrative of the Frenzy of John Dennis."[1] It is written in that style of coarse personal satire of which Swift was a master, but for which Pope was very ill fitted. All his neatness of style seems to desert him when he tries this tone, and nothing is left but a brutal explosion of contemptuous hatred. Dennis is described in his garret, pouring forth insane ravings prompted by his disgust at the success of

[1] Mr. Dilke, it is perhaps right to say, has given some reasons for doubting Pope's authorship of this squib; but the authenticity seems to be established, and Mr. Dilke himself hesitates.

Cato; but not a word is said in reply to Dennis's criticisms. It was plain enough that the author, whoever he might be, was more anxious to satisfy a grudge against Dennis than to defend Dennis's victim. It is not much of a compliment to Addison to say that he had enough good feeling to scorn such a mode of retaliation, and perspicuity enough to see that it would be little to his credit. Accordingly, in his majestic way, he caused Steele to write a note to Lintot (August 4, 1713), disavowing all complicity, and saying that if even he noticed Mr. Dennis's criticisms, it should be in such a way as to give Mr. Dennis no cause of complaint. He added that he had refused to see the pamphlet when it was offered for his inspection, and had expressed his disapproval of such a mode of attack. Nothing could be more becoming; and it does not appear that Addison knew, when writing this note, that Pope was the author of the anonymous assault. If, as the biographers say, Addison's action was not kindly to Pope, it was bare justice to poor Dennis. Pope undoubtedly must have been bitterly vexed at the implied rebuff, and not the less because it was perfectly just. He seems always to have regarded men of Dennis's type as outside the pale of humanity. Their abuse stung him as keenly as if they had been entitled to speak with authority, and yet he retorted it as though they were not entitled to common decency. He would, to all appearance, have regarded an appeal for mercy to a Grub-street author much as Dandie Dinmont regarded Brown's tenderness to a "brock"—as a proof of incredible imbecility, or, rather, of want of proper antipathy to vermin. Dennis, like Philips, was inscribed on the long list of his hatreds; and was pursued almost to the end of his unfortunate life. Pope, it is true, took great credit to himself for helping his miserable enemy when

dying in distress, and wrote a prologue to a play acted for his benefit. Yet even this prologue is a sneer, and one is glad to think that Dennis was past understanding it. We hardly know whether to pity or to condemn the unfortunate poet, whose unworthy hatreds made him suffer far worse torments than those which he could inflict upon their objects.

By this time we may suppose that Pope must have been regarded with anything but favour in the Addison circle; and, in fact, he was passing into the opposite camp, and forming a friendship with Swift and Swift's patrons. No open rupture followed with Addison for the present; but a quarrel was approaching which is, perhaps, the most celebrated in our literary history. Unfortunately, the more closely we look, the more difficult it becomes to give any definite account of it. The statements upon which accounts have been based have been chiefly those of Pope himself; and these involve inconsistencies and demonstrably inaccurate statements. Pope was anxious in later life to show that he had enjoyed the friendship of a man so generally beloved, and was equally anxious to show that he had behaved generously and been treated with injustice and, indeed, with downright treachery. And yet, after reading the various statements made by the original authorities, one begins to doubt whether there was any real quarrel at all; or rather, if one may say so, whether it was not a quarrel upon one side.

It is, indeed, plain that a coolness had sprung up between Pope and Addison. Considering Pope's offences against the senate, his ridicule of Philips, his imposition of that ridicule upon Steele, and his indefensible use of Addison's fame as a stalking-horse in the attack upon Dennis, it is not surprising that he should have been kept at arm's

length. If the rod suspended by Philips at Button's be authentic (as seems probable), the talk about Pope, in the shadow of such an ornament, is easily imaginable. Some attempts seem to have been made at a reconciliation. Jervas, Pope's teacher in painting — a bad artist, but a kindly man—tells Pope on August 20, 1714, of a conversation with Addison. It would have been worth while, he says, for Pope to have been hidden behind a wainscot or a half-length picture to have heard it. Addison expressed a wish for friendly relations, was glad that Pope had not been "carried too far among the enemy" by Swift, and hoped to be of use to him at Court—for Queen Anne died on August 1st; the wheel had turned; and the Whigs were once more the distributors of patronage. Pope's answer to Jervas is in the dignified tone; he attributes Addison's coolness to the ill offices of Philips, and is ready to be on friendly terms whenever Addison recognises his true character and independence of party. Another letter follows, as addressed by Pope to Addison himself; but here, alas! if not in the preceding letters, we are upon doubtful ground. In fact, it is impossible to doubt that the letter has been manipulated after Pope's fashion, if not actually fabricated. It is so dignified as to be insulting. It is like a box on the ear administered by a pedagogue to a repentant but not quite pardoned pupil. Pope has heard (from Jervas, it is implied) of Addison's profession; he is glad to hope that the effect of some "late malevolences" is disappearing; he will not believe (that is, he is strongly inclined to believe) that the author of *Cato* could mean one thing and say another; he will show Addison his first two books of Homer as a proof of this confidence, and hopes that it will not be abused; he challenges Addison to point out the ill nature in the *Essay upon Criticism;*

and winds up by making an utterly irrelevant charge (as a proof, he says, of his own sincerity) of plagiarism against one of Addison's *Spectators*. Had such a letter been actually sent as it now stands, Addison's good nature could scarcely have held out. As it is, we can only assume that during 1714 Pope was on such terms with the clique at Button's, that a quarrel would be a natural result. According to the ordinary account the occasion presented itself in the next year.

A translation of the first Iliad by Tickell appeared (in June, 1715) simultaneously with Pope's first volume. Pope had no right to complain. No man could be supposed to have a monopoly in the translation of Homer. Tickell had the same right to try his hand as Pope; and Pope fully understood this himself. He described to Spence a conversation in which Addison told him of Tickell's intended work. Pope replied that Tickell was perfectly justified. Addison having looked over Tickell's translation of the first book, said that he would prefer not to see Pope's, as it might suggest double dealing; but consented to read Pope's second book, and praised it warmly. In all this, by Pope's own showing, Addison seems to have been scrupulously fair; and if he and the little senate preferred Tickell's work on its first appearance, they had a full right to their opinion, and Pope triumphed easily enough to pardon them. "He was meditating a criticism upon Tickell," says Johnson, "when his adversary sank before him without a blow." Pope's performance was universally preferred, and even Tickell himself yielded by anticipation. He said, in a short preface, that he had abandoned a plan of translating the whole Iliad on finding that a much abler hand had undertaken the work, and that he only published this specimen to bespeak favour for a

translation of the Odyssey. It was, say Pope's apologists, an awkward circumstance that Tickell should publish at the same time as Pope, and that is about all that they can say. It was, we may reply in Stephenson's phrase, very awkward — for Tickell. In all this, in fact, it seems impossible for any reasonable man to discover anything of which Pope had the slightest ground of complaint; but his amazingly irritable nature was not to be calmed by reason. The bare fact that a translation of Homer appeared contemporaneously with his own, and that it came from one of Addison's court, made him furious. He brooded over it, suspected some dark conspiracy against his fame, and gradually mistook his morbid fancies for solid inference. He thought that Tickell had been put up by Addison as his rival, and gradually worked himself into the further belief that Addison himself had actually written the translation which passed under Tickell's name. It does not appear, so far as I know, when or how this suspicion became current. Some time after Addison's death, in 1719, a quarrel took place between Tickell, his literary executor, and Steele. Tickell seemed to insinuate that Steele had not sufficiently acknowledged his obligations to Addison, and Steele, in an angry retort, called Tickell the "reputed translator" of the first Iliad, and challenged him to translate another book successfully. The innuendo shows that Steele, who certainly had some means of knowing, was willing to suppose that Tickell had been helped by Addison. The manuscript of Tickell's work, which has been preserved, is said to prove this to be an error, and in any case there is no real ground for supposing that Addison did anything more than he admittedly told Pope, that is, read Tickell's manuscript and suggest corrections.

To argue seriously about other so-called proofs would

be waste of time. They prove nothing except Pope's extreme anxiety to justify his wild hypothesis of a dark conspiracy. Pope was jealous, spiteful, and credulous. He was driven to fury by Tickell's publication, which had the appearance of a competition. But angry as he was, he could find no real cause of complaint, except by imagining a fictitious conspiracy; and this complaint was never publicly uttered till long after Addison's death. Addison knew, no doubt, of Pope's wrath, but probably cared little for it, except to keep himself clear of so dangerous a companion. He seems to have remained on terms of civility with his antagonist, and no one would have been more surprised than he to hear of the quarrel, upon which so much controversy has been expended.

The whole affair, so far as Addison's character is concerned, thus appears to be a gigantic mare's nest. There is no proof, or even the slightest presumption, that Addison or Addison's friends ever injured Pope, though it is clear that they did not love him. It would have been marvellous if they had. Pope's suspicions are a proof that in this case he was almost subject to the illusion characteristic of actual insanity. The belief that a man is persecuted by hidden conspirators is one of the common symptoms in such cases; and Pope would seem to have been almost in the initial stage of mental disease. His madness, indeed, was not such as would lead us to call him morally irresponsible, nor was it the kind of madness which is to be found in a good many people who well deserve criminal prosecution; but it was a state of mind so morbid as to justify some compassion for the unhappy offender.

One result besides the illustration of Pope's character remains to be noticed. According to Pope's assertion it

was a communication from Lord Warwick which led him to write his celebrated copy of verses upon Addison. Warwick (afterwards Addison's step-son) accused Addison of paying Gildon for a gross libel upon Pope. Pope wrote to Addison, he says, the next day. He said in this letter that he knew of Addison's behaviour—and that, unwilling to take a revenge of the same kind, he would rather tell Addison fairly of his faults in plain words. If he had to take such a step, it would be in some such way as followed, and he subjoined the first sketch of the famous lines. Addison, says Pope, used him very civilly ever afterwards. Indeed, if the account be true, Addison showed his Christian spirit by paying a compliment in one of his *Freeholders* (May 17, 1716) to Pope's Homer.

Macaulay, taking the story for granted, praises Addison's magnanimity, which, I must confess, I should be hardly Christian enough to admire. It was, however, asserted at the time that Pope had not written the verses which have made the quarrel memorable till after Addison's death. They were not published till 1723, and are not mentioned by any independent authority till 1722, though Pope afterwards appealed to Burlington as a witness to their earlier composition. The fact seems to be confirmed by the evidence of Lady M. W. Montagu, but it does not follow that Addison ever saw the verses. He knew that Pope disliked him; but he probably did not suspect the extent of the hostility. Pope himself appears not to have devised the worst part of the story—that of Addison having used Tickell's name—till some years later. Addison was sufficiently magnanimous in praising his spiteful little antagonist as it was; he little knew how deeply that antagonist would seek to injure his reputation.

And here, before passing to the work which afforded the main pretext of the quarrel, it may be well to quote once more the celebrated satire. It may be remarked that its excellence is due in part to the fact that, for once, Pope does not lose his temper. His attack is qualified and really sharpened by an admission of Addison's excellence. It is, therefore, a real masterpiece of satire, not a simple lampoon. That it is an exaggeration is undeniable, and yet its very keenness gives a presumption that it is not altogether without foundation.

"Peace to all such! but were there one whose fires
True genius kindles and fair fame inspires;
Blest with each talent and each art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease;
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne:
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise;
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike;
Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike;
Alike reserved to praise or to commend,
A timorous foe and a suspicious friend;
Dreading ev'n fools, by flatterers besieged,
And so obliging that he ne'er obliged;
Like Cato, give his little senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause;
While wits and templars every sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise;
Who would not laugh if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?"

CHAPTER III.

POPE'S HOMER.

Pope's uneasy relations with the wits at Button's were no obstacle to his success elsewhere. Swift, now at the height of his power, was pleased by his *Windsor Forest*, recommended it to Stella, and soon made the author's acquaintance. The first letter in their long correspondence is a laboured but fairly successful piece of pleasantry from Pope, upon Swift's having offered twenty guineas to the young Papist to change his religion. It is dated December 8, 1713. In the preceding month Bishop Kennet saw Swift in all his glory, and wrote an often quoted description of the scene. Swift was bustling about in the royal antechamber, swelling with conscious importance, distributing advice, promising patronage, whispering to ministers, and filling the whole room with his presence. He finally "instructed a young nobleman that the best poet in England was Mr. Pope, a Papist, who had begun a translation of Homer into English verse, for which he must have them all subscribe; 'for,' says he, 'the author shall not begin to print till I have a thousand guineas for him!'" Swift introduced Pope to some of the leaders of the ministry, and he was soon acquainted with Oxford, Bolingbroke, Atterbury, and many other men of high position. Pope was not disinclined to pride himself upon his familiarity

with the great, though boasting at the same time of his independence. In truth, the morbid vanity which was his cardinal weakness seems to have partaken sufficiently of the nature of genuine self-respect to preserve him from any unworthy concessions. If he flattered, it was as one who expected to be repaid in kind; and though his position was calculated to turn the head of a youth of five-and-twenty, he took his place as a right without humiliating his own dignity. Whether from principle or prudence, he judiciously kept himself free from identification with either party, and both sides took a pride in supporting the great literary undertaking which he had now announced.

When Pope first circulated his proposals for translating Homer, Oxford and Bolingbroke were fellow-ministers, and Swift was their most effective organ in the press. At the time at which his first volume appeared, Bolingbroke was in exile, Oxford under impeachment, and Swift had retired, savagely and sullenly, to his deanery. Yet, through all the intervening political tempest, the subscription list grew and flourished. The pecuniary result was splendid. No author had ever made anything approaching the sum which Pope received, and very few authors, even in the present age of gold, would despise such payment. The details of the magnificent bargain have been handed down, and give the pecuniary measure of Pope's reputation.

The Iliad was to be published in six volumes. For each volume Lintot was to pay 200*l.*; and, besides this, he was to supply Pope gratuitously with the copies for his subscribers. The subscribers paid a guinea a volume, and, as 575 subscribers took 654 copies, Pope received altogether 5320*l.* 4*s.* at the regular price, whilst some royal and distinguished subscribers paid larger sums. By the publication of the Odyssey Pope seems to have made about 3500*l.*

more,[1] after paying his assistants. The result was, therefore, a total profit at least approaching 9000*l.* The last volume of the Odyssey did not appear till 1726, and the payments were thus spread over eleven years. Pope, however, saved enough to be more than comfortable. In the South Sea excitement he ventured to speculate; but though for a time he fancied himself to have made a large sum, he seems to have retired rather a loser than a gainer. But he could say with perfect truth that, "thanks to Homer," he "could live and thrive, indebted to no prince or peer alive." The money success is, however, of less interest to us than the literary. Pope put his best work into the translation of the Iliad. His responsibility, he said, weighed upon him terribly on starting. He used to dream of being on a long journey, uncertain which way to go, and doubting whether he would ever get to the end. Gradually he fell into the habit of translating thirty or forty verses before getting up, and then "piddling with it" for the rest of the morning; and the regular performance of his task made it tolerable. He used, he said at another time, to take advantage of the "first heat," then correct by the original and other translations; and finally to "give it a reading for the versification only." The statement must be partly modified by the suggestion that the translations were probably consulted before the original. Pope's ignorance of Greek—an awkward qualification for a translator of Homer—is undeniable. Gilbert Wakefield, who was, I believe, a fair scholar, and certainly a great admirer of Pope, declares his conviction to be, after a more careful examination of the Homer than any one is now likely to give, that Pope "collected the general purport of every

[1] See Elwin's Pope, Correspondence, vol. iii. p. 129.

passage from some of his predecessors—Dryden" (who only translated the first Iliad), "Dacier, Chapman, or Ogilby." He thinks that Pope would have been puzzled to catch at once the meaning even of the Latin translation, and points out proofs of his ignorance of both languages, and of "ignominious and puerile mistakes."

It is hard to understand at the present day the audacity which could lead a man so ill qualified in point of classical acquirements to undertake such a task. And yet Pope undoubtedly achieved, in some true sense, an astonishing success. He succeeded commercially; for Lintot, after supplying the subscription copies gratuitously, and so losing the cream of the probable purchasers, made a fortune by the remaining sale. He succeeded in the judgment both of the critics and of the public of the next generation. Johnson calls the Homer "the noblest version of poetry the world has ever seen." Gray declared that no other translation would ever equal it, and Gibbon that it had every merit except that of faithfulness to the original. This merit of fidelity, indeed, was scarcely claimed by any one. Bentley's phrase—"a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer"—expresses the uniform view taken from the first by all who could read both. Its fame, however, survived into the present century. Byron speaks—and speaks, I think, with genuine feeling—of the rapture with which he first read Pope as a boy, and says that no one will ever lay him down except for the original. Indeed, the testimonies of opponents are as significant as those of admirers. Johnson remarks that the Homer "may be said to have tuned the English tongue," and that no writer since its appearance has wanted melody. Coleridge virtually admits the fact, though drawing a different conclusion, when he says that the trans-

lation of Homer has been one of the main sources of that "pseudo-poetic diction" which he and Wordsworth were struggling to put out of credit. Cowper, the earliest representative of the same movement, tried to supplant Pope's Homer by his own, and his attempt proved at least the position held in general estimation by his rival. If, in fact, Pope's Homer was a recognized model for near a century, we may dislike the style, but we must admit the power implied in a performance which thus became the accepted standard of style for the best part of a century. How, then, should we estimate the merits of this remarkable work? I give my own opinion upon the subject with diffidence, for it has been discussed by eminently qualified critics. The conditions of a satisfactory translation of Homer have been amply canvassed, and many experiments have been made by accomplished poets who have—what Pope certainly had not—a close acquaintance with the original, and a fine appreciation of its superlative beauties. From the point of view now generally adopted, the task even of criticism requires this double qualification. Not only can no man translate Homer, but no man can even criticise a translation of Homer, without being at once a poet and a fine classical scholar. So far as this is true, I can only apologize for speaking at all, and should be content to refer my readers to such able guides as Mr. Matthew Arnold and the late Professor Conington. And yet I think that something remains to be said which has a bearing upon Pope, however little it may concern Homer.

We—if "we" means modern writers of some classical culture—can claim to appreciate Homer far better than the contemporaries of Pope. But our appreciation involves a clear recognition of the vast difference between

HELENA, MONTANA

ourselves and the ancient Greeks. We see the Homeric poems in their true perspective through the dim vista of shadowy centuries. We regard them as the growth of a long past stage in the historical evolution; implying a different social order—a different ideal of life—an archaic conception of the world and its forces, only to be reconstructed for the imagination by help of long training and serious study. The multiplicity of the laws imposed upon the translator is the consequence of this perception. They amount to saying that a man must manage to project himself into a distant period, and saturate his mind with the corresponding modes of life. If the feat is possible at all, it requires a great and conscious effort, and the attainment of a state of mind which can only be preserved by constant attention. The translator has to wear a mask which is always in danger of being rudely shattered. Such an intellectual feat is likely to produce what, in the most obvious sense, one would call highly artificial work. Modern classicism must be fine-spun, and smell rather of the hot-house than the open air. Undoubtedly some exquisite literary achievements have been accomplished in this spirit; but they are, after all, calculated for the small circle of cultivated minds, and many of their merits can be appreciated only by professors qualified by special training. Most frequently we can hope for pretty playthings, or, at best, for skilful restorations which show learning and taste far more distinctly than a glowing imagination. But even if an original poet can breathe some spirit into classical poems, the poor translator, with the dread of philologists and antiquarians in the background, is so fettered that free movement becomes almost impossible. No one, I should venture to prophesy, will really succeed in such work unless he frankly accepts the im-

possibility of reproducing the original, and aims only at an equivalent for some of its aspects. The perception of this change will enable us to realize Pope's mode of approaching the problem. The condemnatory epithet most frequently applied to him is "artificial;" and yet, as I have just said, a modern translator is surely more artificial, so far as he is attempting a more radical transformation of his own thoughts into the forms of a past epoch. But we can easily see in what sense Pope's work fairly deserves the name. The poets of an older period frankly adopted the classical mythology without any apparent sense of incongruity. They mix heathen deities with Christian saints, and the ancient heroes adopt the manners of chivalrous romance without the slightest difficulty. The freedom was still granted to the writers of the renaissance. Milton makes Phœbus and St. Peter discourse in successive stanzas, as if they belonged to the same pantheon. For poetical purposes the old gods are simply canonized as Christian saints, as in a more theological frame of mind they are regarded as devils. In the reign of common sense this was no longer possible. The incongruity was recognized and condemned. The gods were vanishing under the clearer light, as modern thought began more consciously to assert its independence. Yet the unreality of the old mythology is not felt to be any objection to their use as conventional symbols. Homer's gods, says Pope in his preface, are still the gods of poetry. Their vitality was nearly extinct, but they were regarded as convenient personifications of abstract qualities, machines for epic poetry, or figures to be used in allegory. In the absence of a true historical perception, the same view was attributed to Homer. Homer, as Pope admits, did not invent the gods, but he was the "first who

brought them into a system of machinery for poetry," and showed his fertile imagination by clothing the properties of the elements, and the virtues and vices in forms and persons. And thus Pope does not feel that he is diverging from the spirit of the old mythology when he regards the gods, not as the spontaneous growth of the primitive imagination, but as deliberate contrivances intended to convey moral truth in allegorical fables, and probably devised by sages for the good of the vulgar.

The old gods, then, were made into stiff mechanical figures, as dreary as Justice with her scales, or Fame blowing a trumpet on a monument. They belonged to that family of dismal personifications which it was customary to mark with the help of capital letters. Certainly they are a dismal and frigid set of beings, though they still lead a shivering existence on the tops of public monuments, and hold an occasional wreath over the head of a British grenadier. To identify the Homeric gods with these wearisome constructions was to have a more serious disqualification for fully entering into Homer's spirit than even an imperfect acquaintance with Greek, and Pope is greatly exercised in his mind by their eating, and drinking, and fighting, and uncompromising anthropomorphism. He apologizes for his author, and tries to excuse him for unwilling compliance with popular prejudices. The Homeric theology, he urges, was still substantially sound, and Homer had always a distinct moral and political purpose. The Iliad, for example, was meant to show the wickedness of quarrelling, and the evil results of an insatiable thirst for glory, though shallow persons have thought that Homer only thought to please.

The artificial diction about which so much has been said is the natural vehicle of this treatment. The set of

phrases, and the peculiar mould into which his sentences were cast, was already the accepted type for poetry which aimed at dignity. He was following Dryden, as his own performance became the law for the next generation. The style in which a woman is called a nymph—and women generally are "the fair"—in which shepherds are conscious swains, and a poet invokes the muses and strikes a lyre, and breathes on a reed, and a nightingale singing becomes Philomel "pouring her throat," represents a fashion as worn out as hoops and wigs. By the time of Wordsworth it was a mere survival—a dead form remaining after its true function had entirely vanished. The proposal to return to the language of common life was the natural revolt of one who desired poetry to be above all things the genuine expression of real emotion. Yet it is, I think, impossible to maintain that the diction of poetry should be simply that of common life.

The true principle would rather seem to be that any style becomes bad when it dies; when it is used merely as a tradition, and not as the best mode of producing the desired impression; and when, therefore, it represents a rule imposed from without, and is not an expression of the spontaneous working of minds in which the corresponding impulse is thoroughly incarnated. In such a case, no doubt, the diction becomes a burden, and a man is apt to fancy himself a poet because he is the slave of the external form, instead of using it as the most familiar instrument. By Wordsworth's time the Pope style was thus effete; what ought to be the dress of thought had become the rigid armour into which thought was forcibly compressed, and a revolt was inevitable. We may agree, too, that his peculiar style was in a sense artificial, even in the days of Pope. It had come into existence during

the reign of the Restoration wits, under the influence of foreign models, not as the spontaneous outgrowth of a gradual development, and had therefore something mechanical and conscious, even when it flourished most vigorously. It came in with the periwigs, to which it is so often compared, and, like the artificial head-gear, was an attempt to give a dignified or full-dress appearance to the average prosaic human being. Having this innate weakness of pomposity and exaggeration, it naturally expired, and became altogether ridiculous, with the generation to which it belonged. As the wit or man of the world had at bottom a very inadequate conception of epic poetry, he became inevitably strained and contorted when he tried to give himself the airs of a poet.

After making all such deductions, it would still seem that the bare fact that he was working in a generally accepted style gave Pope a very definite advantage. He spoke more or less in a falsetto, but he could at once strike a key intelligible to his audience. An earlier poet would simply annex Homer's gods and fix them with a mediæval framework. A more modern poet tries to find some style which will correspond to the Homeric as closely as possible, and feels that he is making an experiment beset with all manner of difficulties. Pope needed no more to bother himself about such matters than about grammatical or philological refinements. He found a ready-made style which was assumed to be correct; he had to write in regular rhymed couplets, as neatly rhymed and tersely expressed as might be; and the diction was equally settled. He was to keep to Homer for the substance, but he could throw in any little ornaments to suit the taste of his readers; and if they found out a want of scrupulous fidelity, he might freely say that he did not aim at such details.

Working, therefore, upon the given data, he could enjoy a considerable amount of freedom, and throw his whole energy into the task of forcible expression without feeling himself trammelled at every step. The result would certainly not be Homer, but it might be a fine epic poem as epic poetry was understood in the days of Anne and George I.—a hybrid genus, at the best; something without enough constitutional vigour to be valuable when really original, but not without a merit of its own when modelled upon the lines laid down in the great archetype.

When we look at Pope's Iliad upon this understanding, we cannot fail, I think, to admit that it has merits which make its great success intelligible. If we read it as a purely English poem, the sustained vivacity and emphasis of the style give it a decisive superiority over its rivals. It has become the fashion to quote Chapman since the noble sonnet in which Keats, in testifying to the power of the Elizabethan translator, testifies rather to his own exquisite perception. Chapman was a poet worthy of our great poetic period, and Pope himself testifies to the "daring fiery spirit" which animates his translation, and says that it is not unlike what Homer himself might have written in his youth — surely not a grudging praise. But though this is true, I will venture to assert that Chapman also sins, not merely by his love of quaintness, but by constantly indulging in sheer doggerel. If his lines do not stagnate, they foam and fret like a mountain brook, instead of flowing continuously and majestically like a great river. He surpasses Pope chiefly, as it seems to me, where Pope's conventional verbiage smothers and conceals some vivid image from nature. Pope, of course, was a thorough man of forms, and when he has to speak of sea, or sky, or mountain, generally draws upon the current coin of poetic

phraseology, which has lost all sharpness of impression in its long circulation. Here, for example, is Pope's version of a simile in the fourth book:—

> "As when the winds, ascending by degrees,
> First move the whitening surface of the seas,
> The billows float in order to the shore,
> The waves behind roll on the waves before,
> Till with the growing storm the deeps arise,
> Foam o'er the rocks, and thunder to the skies."

Each phrase is either wrong or escapes from error by vagueness, and one would swear that Pope had never seen the sea. Chapman says,—

> "And as when with the west wind flaws, the sea thrusts up her waves
> One after other, thick and high, upon the groaning shores,
> First in herself loud, but opposed with banks and rocks she roars,
> And all her back in bristles set, spits every way her foam."

This is both clumsy and introduces the quaint and unauthorized image of a pig, but it is unmistakably vivid. Pope is equally troubled when he has to deal with Homer's downright vernacular. He sometimes ventures apologetically to give the original word. He allows Achilles to speak pretty vigorously to Agamemnon in the first book:—

> "O monster! mix'd of insolence and fear,
> Thou dog in forehead, but in heart a deer!"

Chapman translates the phrase more fully, but adds a characteristic quibble:—

> "Thou ever steep'd in wine,
> Dog's face, with heart but of a hart."

Tickell manages the imputation of drink, but has to slur over the dog and the deer:—

"Valiant with wine and furious from the bowl,
Thou fierce-look'd talker, with a coward soul."

Elsewhere Pope hesitates in the use of such plain speaking. He allows Teucer to call Hector a dog, but apologises in a note. "This is literal from the Greek," he says, "and I have ventured it;" though he quotes Milton's "dogs of hell" to back himself with a precedent. But he cannot quite stand Homer's downright comparison of Ajax to an ass, and speaks of him in gingerly fashion as—

"The slow beast with heavy strength endued."

Pope himself thinks the passage "inimitably just and beautiful;" but on the whole, he says, "a translator owes so much to the taste of the age in which he lives as not to make too great a compliment to the former [age]; and this induced me to omit the mention of the word *ass* in the translation." Boileau and Longinus, he tells us, would approve the omission of mean and vulgar words. "Ass" is the vilest word imaginable in English or Latin, but of dignity enough in Greek and Hebrew to be employed "on the most magnificent occasions."

The Homeric phrase is thus often muffled and deadened by Pope's verbiage. Dignity of a kind is gained at the cost of energy. If such changes admit of some apology as an attempt to preserve what is undoubtedly a Homeric characteristic, we must admit that the "dignity" is often false; it rests upon mere mouthing instead of simplicity and directness, and suggests that Pope might have approved the famous emendation "he died in indigent circumstances," for "he died poor." The same weakness is perhaps more annoying when it leads to sins of commission. Pope never scruples to amend Homer by little epigrammatic amplifications, which are characteristic of the

contemporary rhetoric. A single illustration of a fault sufficiently notorious will be sufficient. When Nestor, in the eleventh book, rouses Diomed at night, Pope naturally smoothes down the testy remark of the sleepy warrior; but he tries to improve Nestor's directions. Nestor tells Diomed, in most direct terms, that the need is great, and that he must go at once and rouse Ajax. In Pope's translation we have—

> "Each single Greek in this conclusive strife
> Stands on the sharpest edge of death or life;
> Yet if my years thy kind regard engage,
> Employ thy youth as I employ my age;
> Succeed to these my cares, and rouse the rest;
> He serves me most who serves his country best."

The false air of epigram which Pope gives to the fourth line is characteristic; and the concluding tag, which is quite unauthorized, reminds us irresistibly of one of the rhymes which an actor always spouted to the audience by way of winding up an act in the contemporary drama. Such embroidery is profusely applied by Pope wherever he thinks that Homer, like Diomed, is slumbering too deeply. And, of course, that is not the way in which Nestor roused Diomed or Homer keeps his readers awake.

Such faults have been so fully exposed that we need not dwell upon them further. They come to this, that Pope was really a wit of the days of Queen Anne, and saw only that aspect of Homer which was visible to his kind. The poetic mood was not for him a fine frenzy—for good sense must condemn all frenzy—but a deliberate elevation of the bard by high-heeled shoes and a full-bottomed wig. Seas and mountains, being invisible from Button's, could only be described by worn phrases from the Latin grammar. Even his narrative must be full of epigrams to avoid the

one deadly sin of dulness, and his language must be decorous even at the price of being sometimes emasculated. But accept these conditions, and much still remains. After all, a wit was still a human being, and much more nearly related to us than an ancient Greek. Pope's style, when he is at his best, has the merit of being thoroughly alive; there are no dead masses of useless verbiage; every excrescence has been carefully pruned away; slovenly paraphrases and indistinct slurrings over of the meaning have disappeared. He corrected carefully and scrupulously, as his own statement implies, not with a view of transferring as large a portion as possible of his author's meaning to his own verses, but in order to make the versification as smooth and the sense as transparent as possible. We have the pleasure which we receive from really polished oratory; every point is made to tell; if the emphasis is too often pointed by some showy antithesis, we are at least never uncertain as to the meaning; and if the versification is often monotonous, it is articulate and easily caught at first sight. These are the essential merits of good declamation, and it is in the true declamatory passages that Pope is at his best. The speeches of his heroes are often admirable, full of spirit, well balanced and skilfully arranged pieces of rhetoric — not a mere inorganic series of observations. Undoubtedly the warriors are a little too epigrammatic and too consciously didactic; and we feel almost scandalized when they take to downright blows, as though Walpole and St. John were interrupting a debate in the House of Commons by fisticuffs. They would be better in the senate than the field. But the brilliant rhetoric implies also a sense of dignity which is not mere artificial mouthing. Pope, as it seems to me, rises to a level of sustained eloquence when he has to act as interpreter for the

direct expression of broad, magnanimous sentiment. Classical critics may explain by what shades of feeling the aristocratic grandeur of soul of an English noble differed from the analogous quality in heroic Greece, and find the difference reflected in the "grand style" of Pope as compared with that of Homer. But Pope could at least assume with admirable readiness the lofty air of superiority to personal fears, and patriotic devotion to a great cause, which is common to the type in every age. His tendency to didactic platitudes is at least out of place in such cases, and his dread of vulgarity and quaintness, with his genuine feeling for breadth of effect, frequently enables him to be really dignified and impressive. It will, perhaps, be sufficient illustration of these qualities if I conclude these remarks by giving his translation of Hector's speech to Polydamas in the twelfth book, with its famous *εἷς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης.*

"To him then Hector with disdain return'd;
(Fierce as he spoke, his eyes with fury burn'd)—
Are these the faithful counsels of thy tongue?
Thy will is partial, not thy reason wrong;
Or if the purpose of thy heart thou sent,
Sure Heaven resumes the little sense it lent—
What coward counsels would thy madness move
Against the word, the will reveal'd of Jove?
The leading sign, the irrevocable nod
And happy thunders of the favouring God?
These shall I slight? And guide my wavering mind
By wand'ring birds that flit with every wind?
Ye vagrants of the sky! your wings extend
Or where the suns arise or where descend;
To right or left, unheeded take your way,
While I the dictates of high heaven obey.
Without a sigh his sword the brave man draws,
And asks no omen but his country's cause.

But why should'st thou suspect the war's success?
None fears it more, as none promotes it less.
Tho' all our ships amid yon ships expire,
Trust thy own cowardice to escape the fire.
Troy and her sons may find a general grave,
But thou canst live, for thou canst be a slave.
Yet should the fears that wary mind suggests
Spread their cold poison through our soldiers' breasts,
My javelin can revenge so base a part,
And free the soul that quivers in thy heart."

The six volumes of the Iliad were published during the years 1715–1720, and were closed by a dedication to Congreve, who, as an eminent man of letters, not too closely connected with either Whigs or Tories, was the most appropriate recipient of such a compliment. Pope was enriched by his success, and no doubt wearied by his labours. But his restless intellect would never leave him to indulge in prolonged repose, and, though not avaricious, he was not more averse than other men to increasing his fortune. He soon undertook two sufficiently laborious works. The first was an edition of Shakspeare, for which he only received 217*l.* 10*s.*, and which seems to have been regarded as a failure. It led, like his other publications, to a quarrel to be hereafter mentioned, but need not detain us at present. It appeared in 1725, when he was already deep in another project. The success of the Iliad naturally suggested an attempt upon the Odyssey. Pope, however, was tired of translating, and he arranged for assistance. He took into alliance a couple of Cambridge men, who were small poets capable of fairly adopting his versification. One of them was William Broome, a clergyman who held several livings and married a rich widow. Unfortunately his independence did not restrain him from writing poetry, for which want of means would have been

the only sufficient excuse. He was a man of some classical attainments, and had helped Pope in compiling notes to the Iliad from Eustathius, an author whom Pope would have been scarcely able to read without such assistance. Elijah Fenton, his other assistant, was a Cambridge man who had sacrificed his claims of preferment by becoming a non-juror, and picked up a living partly by writing and chiefly by acting as tutor to Lord Orrery, and afterwards in the family of Trumball's widow. Pope, who introduced him to Lady Trumball, had also introduced him to Craggs, who, when Secretary of State, felt his want of a decent education, and wished to be polished by some competent person. He seems to have been a kindly, idle, honourable man, who died, says Pope, of indolence, and more immediately, it appears, of the gout. The alliance thus formed was rather a delicate one, and was embittered by some of Pope's usual trickery. In issuing his proposals he spoke in ambiguous terms of two friends who were to render him some undefined assistance, and did not claim to be the translator, but to have undertaken the translation. The assistants, in fact, did half the work, Broome translating eight, and Fenton four, out of the twenty-four books. Pope was unwilling to acknowledge the full amount of their contributions; he persuaded Broome — a weak, good-natured man — to set his hand to a postscript to the Odyssey, in which only three books are given to Broome himself, and only two to Fenton. When Pope was attacked for passing off other people's verses as his own, he boldly appealed to this statement to prove that he had only received Broome's help in three books, and at the same time stated the whole amount which he had paid for the eight, as though it had been paid for the three. When Broome, in spite

of his subservience, became a little restive under this treatment, Pope indirectly admitted the truth by claiming only twelve books in an advertisement to his works, and in a note to the *Dunciad*, but did not explicitly retract the other statement. Broome could not effectively rebuke his fellow-sinner. He had, in fact, conspired with Pope to attract the public by the use of the most popular name, and could not even claim his own afterwards. He had, indeed, talked too much, according to Pope; and the poet's morality is oddly illustrated in a letter, in which he complains of Broome's indiscretion for letting out the secret; and explains that, as the facts are so far known, it would now be "unjust and dishonourable" to continue the concealment. It would be impossible to accept more frankly the theory that lying is wrong when it is found out. Meanwhile Pope's conduct to his victims or accomplices was not over-generous. He made over 3500*l.* after paying Broome 500*l.* (including 100*l.* for notes) and Fenton 200*l.*—that is, 50*l.* a book. The rate of pay was as high as the work was worth, and as much as it would fetch in the open market. The large sum was entirely due to Pope's reputation, though obtained, so far as the true authorship was concealed, upon something like false pretences. Still, we could have wished that he had been a little more liberal with his share of the plunder. A coolness ensued between the principal and his partners in consequence of these questionable dealings. Fenton seems never to have been reconciled to Pope, though they did not openly quarrel, and Pope wrote a laudatory epitaph for him on his death in 1730. Broome—a weaker man—though insulted by Pope in the *Dunciad* and the Miscellanies, accepted a reconciliation, for which Pope seems to have been

eager, perhaps feeling some touch of remorse for the injuries which he had inflicted.

The shares of the three colleagues in the Odyssey are not to be easily distinguished by internal evidence. On trying the experiment by a cursory reading, I confess (though a critic does not willingly admit his fallibility) that I took some of Broome's work for Pope's, and, though closer study or an acuter perception might discriminate more accurately, I do not think that the distinction would be easy. This may be taken to confirm the common theory that Pope's versification was a mere mechanical trick. Without admitting this, it must be admitted that the external characteristics of his manner were easily caught; and that it was not hard for a clever versifier to produce something closely resembling his inferior work, especially when following the same original. But it may be added that Pope's Odyssey was really inferior to the Iliad, both because his declamatory style is more out of place in its romantic narrative, and because he was weary and languid, and glad to turn his fame to account without more labour than necessary. The Odyssey, I may say, in conclusion, led to one incidental advantage. It was criticised by Spence, a mild and cultivated scholar, who was professor of poetry at Oxford. His observations, according to Johnson, were candid, though not indicative of a powerful mind. Pope, he adds, had in Spence the first experience of a critic "who censured with respect and praised with alacrity." Pope made Spence's acquaintance, recommended him to patrons, and was repaid with warm admiration."

CHAPTER IV.

POPE AT TWICKENHAM.

When Pope finished his translation of the Iliad, he was congratulated by his friend Gay in a pleasant copy of verses marked by the usual *bonhomie* of the fat, kindly man. Gay supposes himself to be welcoming his friend on the return from his long expedition.

> "Did I not see thee when thou first sett'st sail,
> To seek adventures fair in Homer's land?
> Did I not see thy sinking spirits fail,
> And wish thy bark had never left the strand?
> Even in mid ocean often didst thou quail,
> And oft lift up thy holy eye and hand,
> Praying to virgin dear and saintly choir
> Back to the port to bring thy bark entire."

And now the bark is sailing up the Thames, with bells ringing, bonfires blazing, and "bones and cleavers" clashing. So splendid a show suggests Lord Mayor's Day, but, in fact, it is only the crowd of Pope's friends come to welcome him on his successful achievement; and a long catalogue follows, in which each is indicated by some appropriate epithet. The list includes some doubtful sympathizers, such as Gildon, who comes "hearing thou hast riches," and even Dennis, who, in fact, continued to growl out criticisms against the triumphant poet. Steele, too, and Tickell,—

"Whose skiff (in partnership they say)
Set forth for Greece but founder'd on the way,"

would not applaud very cordially. Addison, their common hero, was beyond the reach of satire or praise. Parnell, who had contributed a life of Homer, died in 1718; and Rowe and Garth, sound Whigs, but friends and often boon companions of the little papist, had followed. Swift was breathing "Bœotian air" in his deanery, and St. John was "confined to foreign climates" for very sufficient reasons. Any such roll-call of friends must show melancholy gaps, and sometimes the gaps are more significant than the names. Yet Pope could boast of a numerous body of men, many of them of high distinction, who were ready to give him a warm welcome. There were, indeed, few eminent persons of the time, either in the political or literary worlds, with whom this sensitive and restless little invalid did not come into contact, hostile or friendly, at some part of his career. His friendships were keen and his hostilities more than proportionally bitter. We see his fragile figure, glancing rapidly from one hospitable circle to another, but always standing a little apart; now paying court to some conspicuous wit, or philosopher, or statesman, or beauty; now taking deadly offence for some utterly inexplicable reason; writhing with agony under clumsy blows which a robuster nature would have met with contemptuous laughter; racking his wits to contrive exquisite compliments, and suddenly exploding in sheer Billingsgate; making a mountain of every mole-hill in his pilgrimage; always preoccupied with his last literary project; and yet finding time for innumerable intrigues, for carrying out schemes of vengeance for wounded vanity, and for introducing himself into every quarrel that was going on around him. In all his multifarious schemes

and occupations he found it convenient to cover himself by elaborate mystifications, and was as anxious (it would seem) to deceive posterity as to impose upon contemporaries; and hence it is as difficult clearly to disentangle the twisted threads of his complex history as to give an intelligible picture of the result of the investigation. The publication of the Iliad, however, marks a kind of central point in his history. Pope has reached independence, and become the acknowledged head of the literary world; and it will be convenient here to take a brief survey of his position, before following out two or three different series of events, which can scarcely be given in chronological order. Pope, when he first came to town and followed Wycherley about like a dog, had tried to assume the airs of a rake. The same tone is adopted in many of his earlier letters. At Binfield he became demure, correct, and respectful to the religious scruples of his parents. In his visits to London and Bath he is little better than one of the wicked. In a copy of verses (not too decent) written in 1715, as a "Farewell to London," he gives us to understand that he has been hearing the chimes at midnight, and knows where the bona-robas dwell. He is forced to leave his jovial friends and his worrying publishers "for Homer (damn him!) calls." He is, so he assures us,

> "Still idle, with a busy air
> Deep whimsies to contrive;
> The gayest valetudinaire,
> Most thinking rake alive."

And he takes a sad leave of London pleasures.

> "Luxurious lobster nights, farewell,
> For sober, studious days!
> And Burlington's delicious meal
> For salads, tarts, and pease."

Writing from Bath a little earlier, to Teresa and Martha Blount, he employs the same jaunty strain. "Every one," he says, "values Mr. Pope, but every one for a different reason. One for his adherence to the Catholic faith, another for his neglect of Popish superstition; one for his good behaviour, another for his whimsicalities; Mr. Titcomb for his pretty atheistical jests; Mr. Caryll for his moral and Christian sentences; Mrs. Teresa for his reflections on Mrs. Patty; Mrs. Patty for his reflections on Mrs. Teresa." He is an "agreeable rattle;" the accomplished rake, drinking with the wits, though above boozing with the squire, and capable of alleging his drunkenness as an excuse for writing very questionable letters to ladies.

Pope was too sickly and too serious to indulge long in such youthful fopperies. He had no fund of high spirits to draw upon, and his playfulness was too near deadly earnest for the comedy of common life. He had too much intellect to be a mere fribble, and had not the strong animal passions of the thorough debauchee. Age came upon him rapidly, and he had sown his wild oats, such as they were, while still a young man. Meanwhile his reputation and his circle of acquaintances were rapidly spreading, and in spite of all his disqualifications for the coarser forms of conviviality, he took the keenest possible interest in the life that went on around him. A satirist may not be a pleasant companion, but he must frequent society; he must be on the watch for his natural prey; he must describe the gossip of the day, for it is the raw material from which he spins his finished fabric. Pope, as his writings show, was an eager recipient of all current rumours, whether they affected his aristocratic friends or the humble denizens of Grub-street. Fully to elucidate his poems, a commentator requires to have at his fingers' ends

the whole *chronique scandaleuse* of the day. With such tastes, it was natural that, as the subscriptions for his Homer began to pour in, he should be anxious to move nearer the great social centre. London itself might be too exciting for his health and too destructive of literary leisure. Accordingly, in 1716, the little property at Binfield was sold, and the Pope family moved to Mawson's New Buildings, on the bank of the river at Chiswick, and "under the wing of my Lord Burlington." He seems to have been a little ashamed of the residence; the name of it is certainly neither aristocratic nor poetical. Two years later, on the death of his father, he moved up the river to the villa at Twickenham, which has always been associated with his name, and was his home for the last twenty-five years of his life. There he had the advantage of being just on the boundary of the great world. He was within easy reach of Hampton Court, Richmond, and Kew; places which, during Pope's residence, were frequently glorified by the presence of George II. and his heir and natural enemy, Frederick, Prince of Wales. Pope, indeed, did not enjoy the honour of any personal interview with royalty. George is said to have called him a very honest man after reading his *Dunciad;* but Pope's references to his Sovereign were not complimentary. There was a report, referred to by Swift, that Pope had purposely avoided a visit from Queen Caroline. He was on very friendly terms with Mrs. Howard—afterwards Lady Suffolk—the powerless mistress, who was intimate with two of his chief friends, Bathurst and Peterborough, and who settled at Marble Villa, in Twickenham. Pope and Bathurst helped to lay out her grounds, and she stayed there to become a friendly neighbour of Horace Walpole, who, unluckily for lovers of gossip, did not become a Twickenhamite until

three years after Pope's death. Pope was naturally more allied with the Prince of Wales, who occasionally visited him, and became intimate with the band of patriots and enthusiasts who saw in the heir to the throne the coming "patriot king." Bolingbroke, too, the great inspirer of the opposition, and Pope's most revered friend, was for ten years at Dawley, within an easy drive. London was easily accessible by road and by the river which bounded his lawn. His waterman appears to have been one of the regular members of his household. There he had every opportunity for the indulgence of his favourite tastes. The villa was on one of the loveliest reaches of the Thames, not yet polluted by the encroachments of London. The house itself was destroyed in the beginning of this century; and the garden (if we may trust Horace Walpole) had been previously spoilt. This garden, says Walpole, was a little bit of ground of five acres, enclosed by three lanes. "Pope had twisted and twirled and rhymed and harmonized this, till it appeared two or three sweet little lawns, opening and opening beyond one another, and the whole surrounded with impenetrable woods." These, it appears, were hacked and hewed into mere desolation by the next proprietor. Pope was, indeed, an ardent lover of the rising art of landscape gardening; he was familiar with Bridgeman and Kent, the great authorities of the time, and his example and precepts helped to promote the development of a less formal style. His theories are partly indicated in the description of Timon's villa.

> "His gardens next your admiration call,
> On every side you look, behold the wall!
> No pleasing intricacies intervene,
> No artful wildness to perplex the scene;
> Grove nods at grove, each alley has a brother,
> And half the platform just reflects the other."

Pope's taste, indeed, tolerated various old-fashioned excrescences which we profess to despise. He admired mock classical temples and obelisks erected judiciously at the ends of vistas. His most famous piece of handiwork, the grotto at Twickenham, still remains, and is, in fact, a short tunnel under the high road to connect his grounds with the lawn which slopes to the river. He describes, in a letter to one of his friends, his "temple wholly comprised of shells in the rustic manner," and his famous grotto so provided with mirrors that when the doors are shut it becomes a camera obscura, reflecting hills, river, and boats, and when lighted up glitters with rays reflected from bits of looking-glass in angular form. His friends pleased him by sending pieces of spar from the mines of Cornwall and Derbyshire, petrifactions, marble, coral, crystals, and humming-birds' nests. It was, in fact, a gorgeous example of the kind of architecture with which the cit delighted to adorn his country box. The hobby, whether in good taste or not, gave Pope never-ceasing amusement; and he wrote some characteristic verses in its praise.

In his grotto, as he declares in another place, he could sit in peace with his friends, undisturbed by the distant din of the world.

> "There my retreat the best companions grace,
> Chiefs out of war, and statesmen out of place;
> There St. John mingles with my friendly bowl
> The feast of reason and the flow of soul;
> And he whose lightning pierced the Iberian lines
> Now forms my quincunx and now ranks my vines,
> Or tames the genius of the stubborn plain
> Almost as quickly as he conquer'd Spain."

The grotto, one would fear, was better fitted for frogs than for philosophers capable of rheumatic twinges. But de-

ducting what we please from such utterances on the score of affectation, the picture of Pope amusing himself with his grotto and his plantations, directing old John Searle, his gardener, and conversing with the friends whom he compliments so gracefully, is, perhaps, the pleasantest in his history. He was far too restless and too keenly interested in society and literature to resign himself permanently to any such retreat.

Pope's constitutional irritability kept him constantly on the wing. Though little interested in politics, he liked to be on the edge of any political commotion. He appeared in London on the death of Queen Caroline, in 1737; and Bathurst remarked that "he was as sure to be there in a bustle as a porpoise in a storm." "Our friend Pope," said Jervas not long before, "is off and on, here and there, everywhere and nowhere, *à son ordinaire*, and, therefore as well as we can hope for a carcase so crazy." The Twickenham villa, though nominally dedicated to repose, became, of course, a centre of attraction for the interviewers of the day. The opening lines of the Prologue to the Satires give a vivacious description of the crowds of authors who rushed to "Twitnam," to obtain his patronage or countenance, in a day when editors were not the natural scapegoats of such aspirants.

> "What walls can guard me, or what shades can hide?
> They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide;
> By land, by water, they renew the charge;
> They stop the chariot and they board the barge:
> No place is sacred, not the church is free,
> E'en Sunday shines no Sabbath-day to me."

And even at an earlier period he occasionally retreated from the bustle to find time for his Homer. Lord Har-

court, the Chancellor in the last years of Queen Anne, allowed him to take up his residence in his old house of Stanton Harcourt, in Oxfordshire. He inscribed on a pane of glass in an upper room, "In the year 1718 Alexander Pope finished here the fifth volume of Homer." In his earlier days he was often rambling about on horseback. A letter from Jervas gives the plan of one such jaunt (in 1715), with Arbuthnot and Disney for companions. Arbuthnot is to be commander-in-chief, and allows only a shirt and a cravat to be carried in each traveller's pocket. They are to make a moderate journey each day, and stay at the houses of various friends, ending ultimately at Bath. Another letter of about the same date describes a ride to Oxford, in which Pope is overtaken by his publisher, Lintot, who lets him into various secrets of the trade, and proposes that Pope should turn an ode of Horace whilst sitting under the trees to rest. "Lord, if you pleased, what a clever miscellany might you make at leisure hours!" exclaims the man of business; and though Pope laughed at the advice, we might fancy that he took it to heart. He always had bits of verse on the anvil, ready to be hammered and polished at any moment. But even Pope could not be always writing, and the mere mention of these rambles suggests pleasant lounging through old-world country lanes of the quiet century. We think of the roadside life seen by Parson Adams or Humphry Clinker, and of which Mr. Borrow caught the last glimpse when dwelling in the tents of the Romany. In later days Pope had to put his "crazy carcase" into a carriage, and occasionally came in for less pleasant experiences. Whilst driving home one night from Dawley, in Bolingbroke's carriage and six, he was upset in a stream. He escaped drowning, though the

water was "up to the knots of his periwig," but he was so cut by the broken glass that he nearly lost the use of his right hand. On another occasion Spence was delighted by the sudden appearance of the poet at Oxford, "dreadfully fatigued;" he had good-naturedly lent his own chariot to a lady who had been hurt in an upset, and had walked three miles to Oxford on a sultry day.

A man of such brilliant wit, familiar with so many social circles, should have been a charming companion. It must, however, be admitted that the accounts which have come down to us do not confirm such preconceived impressions. Like his great rival, Addison, though for other reasons, he was generally disappointing in society. Pope, as may be guessed from Spence's reports, had a large fund of interesting literary talk, such as youthful aspirants to fame would be delighted to receive with reverence; he had the reputation for telling anecdotes skilfully, and we may suppose that when he felt at ease, with a respectful and safe companion, he could do himself justice. But he must have been very trying to his hosts. He could seldom lay aside his self-consciousness sufficiently to write an easy letter; and the same fault probably spoilt his conversation. Swift complains of him as a silent and inattentive companion. He went to sleep at his own table, says Johnson, when the Prince of Wales was talking poetry to him—certainly a severe trial. He would, we may guess, be silent till he had something to say worthy of the great Pope, and would then doubt whether it was not wise to treasure it up for preservation in a couplet. His sister declared that she had never seen him laugh heartily; and Spence, who records the saying, is surprised, because Pope was said to have been very lively in his youth; but admits that in later years he never went beyond a "particular easy

smile." A hearty laugh would have sounded strangely from the touchy, moody, intriguing little man, who could "hardly drink tea without a stratagem." His sensitiveness, indeed, appearing by his often weeping when he read moving passages; but we can hardly imagine him as ever capable of genial self-abandonment.

His unsocial habits, indeed, were a natural consequence of ill-health. He never seems to have been thoroughly well for many days together. He implied no more than the truth when he speaks of his Muse as helping him through that "long disease, his life." Writing to Bathurst in 1728, he says that he does not expect to enjoy any health for four days together; and, not long after, Bathurst remonstrates with him for his carelessness, asking him whether it is not enough to have the headache for four days in the week and be sick for the other three. It is no small proof of intellectual energy that he managed to do so much thorough work under such disadvantages, and his letters show less of the invalid's querulous spirit than we might well have pardoned. Johnson gives a painful account of his physical defects, on the authority of an old servant of Lord Oxford, who frequently saw him in his later years. He was so weak as to be unable to rise to dress himself without help. He was so sensitive to cold that he had to wear a kind of fur doublet under a coarse linen shirt; one of his sides was contracted, and he could scarcely stand upright till he was laced into a boddice made of stiff canvas; his legs were so slender that he had to wear three pairs of stockings, which he was unable to draw on and off without help. His seat had to be raised to bring him to a level with common tables. In one of his papers in the *Guardian* he describes himself apparently as Dick Distich: "a live-

ly little creature, with long legs and arms; a spider[1] is no ill emblem of him; he has been taken at a distance for a small windmill." His face, says Johnson, was "not displeasing," and the portraits are eminently characteristic. The thin, drawn features wear the expression of habitual pain, but are brightened up by the vivid and penetrating eye, which seems to be the characteristic poetical beauty.

It was, after all, a gallant spirit which got so much work out of this crazy carcase, and kept it going, spite of all its feebleness, for fifty-six years. The servant whom Johnson quotes said that she was called from her bed four times in one night, "in the dreadful winter of Forty," to supply him with paper, lest he should lose a thought. His constitution was already breaking down, but the intellect was still striving to save every moment allowed to him. His friends laughed at his habit of scribbling upon odd bits of paper. "Paper-sparing" Pope is the epithet bestowed upon him by Swift, and a great part of the Iliad is written upon the backs of letters. The habit seems to have been regarded as illustrative of his economical habits; but it was also natural to a man who was on the watch to turn every fragment of time to account. If anything was to be finished, he must snatch at the brief intervals allowed by his many infirmities. Naturally, he fell into many of the self-indulgent and troublesome ways of the valetudinarian. He was constantly wanting coffee, which seems to have soothed his headaches; and for this and his other wants he used to wear out the servants in his friends' houses by "frequent and frivolous errands." Yet he was apparently a kind master. His servants lived with him

[1] The same comparison is made by Cibber in a rather unsavoury passage.

till they became friends, and he took care to pay so well the unfortunate servant whose sleep was broken by his calls, that she said that she would want no wages in a family where she had to wait upon Mr. Pope. Another form of self-indulgence was more injurious to himself. He pampered his appetite with highly-seasoned dishes, and liked to receive delicacies from his friends. His death was imputed by some of his friends, says Johnson, to "a silver saucepan in which it was his delight to eat potted lampreys." He would always get up for dinner, in spite of headache, when told that this delicacy was provided. Yet, as Johnson also observes, the excesses cannot have been very great, as they did not sooner cut short so fragile an existence. "Two bites and a sup more than your stint," says Swift, "will cost you more than others pay for a regular debauch."

At home, indeed, he appears to have been generally abstemious. Probably the habits of his parents' little household were very simple; and Pope, like Swift, knew the value of independence well enough to be systematically economical. Swift, indeed, had a more generous heart, and a lordly indifference to making money by his writings, which Pope, who owed his fortune chiefly to his Homer, did not attempt to rival. Swift alludes, in his letters to an anecdote, which we may hope does not represent his habitual practice. Pope, it appears, was entertaining a couple of friends, and when four glasses had been consumed from a pint, retired, saying, "Gentlemen, I leave you to your wine." "I tell that story to everybody," says Swift, "in commendation of Mr. Pope's abstemiousness;" but he tells it, one may guess, with something of a rueful countenance. At times, however, it seems that Pope could give a "splendid dinner," and show no want of the "skill and elegance

which such performances require." Pope, in fact, seems to have shown a combination of qualities which is not uncommon, though sometimes called inconsistent. He valued money as a man values it who has been poor and feels it essential to his comfort to be fairly beyond the reach of want, and was accordingly pretty sharp at making a bargain with a publisher or in arranging terms with a collaborator. But he could also be liberal on occasion. Johnson says that his whole income amounted to about 800*l.* a year, out of which he professed himself able to assign 100*l.* to charity; and though the figures are doubtful, and all Pope's statements about his own proceedings liable to suspicion, he appears to have been often generous in helping the distressed with money, as well as with advice or recommendations to his powerful friends. Pope, by his infirmities and his talents, belonged to the dependent class of mankind. He was in no sense capable of standing firmly upon his own legs. He had a longing, sometimes pathetic and sometimes humiliating, for the applause of his fellows and the sympathy of friends. With feelings so morbidly sensitive, and with such a lamentable incapacity for straightforward openness in any relation of life, he was naturally a dangerous companion. He might be brooding over some fancied injury or neglect, and meditating revenge, when he appeared to be on good terms; when really desiring to do a service to a friend, he might adopt some tortuous means for obtaining his ends, which would convert the service into an injury; and, if he had once become alienated, the past friendship would be remembered by him as involving a kind of humiliation, and therefore supplying additional keenness to his resentment. And yet it is plain that throughout life he was always anxious to lean upon some stronger nature; to have a sturdy supporter whom

he was too apt to turn into an accomplice; or at least to have some good-natured, easy-going companion, in whose society he might find repose for his tortured nerves. And therefore, though the story of his friendships is unfortunately intertwined with the story of bitter quarrels and indefensible acts of treachery, it also reveals a touching desire for the kind of consolation which would be most valuable to one so accessible to the pettiest stings of his enemies. He had many warm friends, moreover, who, by good fortune or the exercise of unusual prudence, never excited his wrath, and whom he repaid by genuine affection. Some of these friendships have become famous, and will be best noticed in connexion with passages in his future career. It will be sufficient if I here notice a few names, in order to show that a complete picture of Pope's life, if it could now be produced, would include many figures of which we only catch occasional glimpses.

Pope, as I have said, though most closely connected with the Tories and Jacobites, disclaimed any close party connexion, and had some relations with the Whigs. Some courtesies even passed between him and the great Sir Robert Walpole, whose interest in literature was a vanishing quantity, and whose bitterest enemies were Pope's greatest friends. Walpole, however, as we have seen, asked for preferment for Pope's old friend, and Pope repaid him with more than one compliment. Thus, in the Epilogue to the Satires, he says,—

> "Seen him I have, but in his happier hour
> Of social pleasure, ill exchanged for power.
> Seen him, encumber'd with the venal tribe,
> Smile without art and win without a bribe."

Another Whig statesman for whom Pope seems to have entertained an especially warm regard was James Craggs,

Addison's successor as Secretary of State, who died whilst under suspicion of peculation in the South Sea business (1721). The Whig connexion might have been turned to account. Craggs, during his brief tenure of office, offered Pope a pension of 300*l.* a year (from the secret service money), which Pope declined, whilst saying that, if in want of money, he would apply to Craggs as a friend. A negotiation of the same kind took place with Halifax, who aimed at the glory of being the great literary patron. It seems that he was anxious to have the Homer dedicated to him, and Pope, being unwilling to gratify him, or, as Johnson says, being less eager for money than Halifax for praise, sent a cool answer, and the negotiation passed off. Pope afterwards revenged himself for this offence by his bitter satire on Bufo in the *Prologue* to his *Satires*, though he had not the courage to admit its obvious application.

Pope deserves the credit of preserving his independence. He would not stoop low enough to take a pension at the price virtually demanded by the party in power. He was not, however, inaccessible to aristocratic blandishments, and was proud to be the valued and petted guest in many great houses. Through Swift he had become acquainted with Oxford, the colleague of Bolingbroke, and was a frequent and intimate guest of the second Earl, from whose servant Johnson derived the curious information as to his habits. Harcourt, Oxford's Chancellor, lent him a house whilst translating Homer. Sheffield, the Duke of Buckingham, had been an early patron, and after the duke's death, Pope, at the request of his eccentric duchess, the illegitimate daughter of James II., edited some of his works, and got into trouble for some Jacobite phrases contained in them. His most familiar friend among the opposition magnates was Lord Bathurst, a man of uncommon vivacity

and good-humour. He was born four years before Pope, and died more than thirty years later, at the age of ninety-one. One of the finest passages in Burke's American speeches turns upon the vast changes which had taken place during Bathurst's lifetime. He lived to see his son Chancellor. Two years before his death the son left the father's dinner-table with some remark upon the advantage of regular habits. "Now the old gentleman's gone," said the lively youth of eighty-nine to the remaining guests, "let's crack the other bottle." Bathurst delighted in planting, and Pope in giving him advice, and in discussing the opening of vistas and erection of temples, and the poet was apt to be vexed when his advice was not taken.

Another friend, even more restless and comet-like in his appearances, was the famous Peterborough, the man who had seen more kings and postilions than any one in Europe; of whom Walsh injudiciously remarked that he had too much wit to be entrusted with the command of an army; and whose victories, soon after the unlucky remark had been made, were so brilliant as to resemble strategical epigrams. Pope seems to have been dazzled by the amazing vivacity of the man, and has left a curious description of his last days. Pope found him on the eve of the voyage in which he died, sick of an agonizing disease, crying out for pain at night, fainting away twice in the morning, lying like a dead man for a time, and in the intervals of pain giving a dinner to ten people, laughing, talking, declaiming against the corruption of the times, giving directions to his workmen, and insisting upon going to sea in a yacht without preparations for landing anywhere in particular. Pope seems to have been specially attracted by such men, with intellects as restless as his own, but with

infinitely more vitality to stand the consequent wear and tear.

We should be better pleased if we could restore a vivid image of the inner circle upon which his happiness most intimately depended. In one relation of life Pope's conduct was not only blameless, but thoroughly loveable. He was, it is plain, the best of sons. Even here, it is true, he is a little too consciously virtuous. Yet when he speaks of his father and mother there are tears in his voice, and it is impossible not to recognize genuine warmth of heart.

> "Me let the tender office long engage
> To rock the cradle of reposing age,
> With lenient arts extend a mother's breath,
> Make languor smile, and soothe the bed of death,
> Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
> And keep awhile one parent from the sky!"[1]

Such verses are a spring in the desert, a gush of the true feeling, which contrasts with the strained and factitious sentiment in his earlier rhetoric, and almost forces us to love the writer. Could Pope have preserved that higher mood, he would have held our affections as he often delights our intellect.

Unluckily we can catch but few glimpses of Pope's family life; of the old mother and father and the affectionate nurse, who lived with him till 1721, and died during a dangerous illness of his mother's. The father, of whom we hear little after his early criticism of the son's bad "rhymes," died in 1717; and a brief note to Martha Blount gives Pope's feelings as fully as many pages: "My

[1] It is curious to compare these verses with the original copy contained in a letter to Aaron Hill. The comparison shows how skilfully Pope polished his most successful passages.

poor father died last night. Believe, since I don't forget you this moment, I never shall." The mother survived till 1733, tenderly watched by Pope, who would never be long absent from her, and whose references to her are uniformly tender and beautiful. One or two of her letters are preserved. "My Deare,—A letter from your sister just now is come and gone, Mr. Mennock and Charls Rackitt, to take his leve of us; but being nothing in it, doe not send it. . . . Your sister is very well, but your brother is not. There's Mr. Blunt of Maypell Durom is dead, the same day that Mr. Inglefield died. My servis to Mrs. Blounts, and all that ask of me. I hope to here from you, and that you are well, which is my dalye prayers; this with my blessing." The old lady had peculiar views of orthography; and Pope, it is said, gave her the pleasure of copying out some of his Homer, though the necessary corrections gave him and the printers more trouble than would be saved by such an amanuensis. Three days after her death he wrote to Richardson, the painter. "I thank God," he says, "her death was as easy as her life was innocent; and as it cost her not a groan, nor even a sigh, there is yet upon her countenance such an expression of tranquillity, nay, almost of pleasure, that it is even enviable to behold it. It would afford the finest image of a saint expired that ever painter drew, and it would be the greatest obligation which ever that obliging art could ever bestow upon a friend, if you would come and sketch it for me. I am sure if there be no very prevalent obstacle, you will leave any common business to do this, and I shall hope to see you this evening as late as you will, or to-morrow morning as early, before this winter flower is faded." Swift's comment, on hearing the news, gives the only consolation which Pope could have felt. "She died in ex-

treme old age," he writes, "without pain, under the care of the most dutiful son I have ever known or heard of, which is a felicity not happening to one in a million." And with her death, its most touching and ennobling influence faded from Pope's life. There is no particular merit in loving a mother, but few biographies give a more striking proof that the loving discharge of a common duty may give a charm to a whole character. It is melancholy to add that we often have to appeal to this part of his story, to assure ourselves that Pope was really deserving of some affection.

The part of Pope's history which naturally follows brings us again to the region of unsolved mysteries. The one prescription which a spiritual physician would have suggested in Pope's case would have been the love of a good and sensible woman. A nature so capable of tender feeling and so essentially dependent upon others, might have been at once soothed and supported by a happy domestic life; though it must be admitted that it would have required no common qualifications in a wife to calm so irritable and jealous a spirit. Pope was unfortunate in his surroundings. The bachelor society of that day, not only the society of the Wycherleys and Cromwells, but the more virtuous society of Addison and his friends, was certainly not remarkable for any exalted tone about women. Bolingbroke, Peterborough, and Bathurst, Pope's most admired friends, were all more or less flagrantly licentious; and Swift's mysterious story shows that if he could love a woman, his love might be as dangerous as hatred. In such a school, Pope, eminently malleable to the opinions of his companions, was not likely to acquire a high standard of sentiment. His personal defects were equally against him. His frame was not adapted for the robust gallantry of the

time. He wanted a nurse rather than a wife; and if his infirmities might excite pity, pity is akin to contempt as well as to love. The poor little invalid, brutally abused for his deformity by such men as Dennis and his friends, was stung beyond all self-control by their coarse laughter, and by the consciousness that it only echoed, in a more brutal shape, the judgment of the fine ladies of the time. His language about women, sometimes expressing coarse contempt and sometimes rising to ferocity, is the reaction of his morbid sensibility under such real and imagined scorn.

Such feelings must be remembered in speaking briefly of two love affairs, if they are such, which profoundly affected his happiness. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu is amongst the most conspicuous figures of the time. She had been made a toast at the Kitcat Club at the age of eight, and she translated Epictetus (from the Latin) before she was twenty. She wrote verses, some of them amazingly coarse, though decidedly clever, and had married Mr. Edward Wortley Montagu in defiance of her father's will, though even in this, her most romantic proceeding, there are curious indications of a respect for prudential considerations. Her husband was a friend of Addison's, and a Whig; and she accompanied him on an embassy to Constantinople in 1716–17, where she wrote the excellent letters published after her death, and whence she imported the practice of inoculation, in spite of much opposition. A distinguished leader of society, she was also a woman of shrewd intellect and masculine character. In 1739 she left her husband, though no quarrel preceded or followed the separation, and settled for many years in Italy. Her letters are characteristic of the keen woman of the world, with an underlying vein of nobler feeling, per-

verted by harsh experience into a prevailing cynicism. Pope had made her acquaintance before she left England. He wrote poems to her and corrected her verses till she cruelly refused his services, on the painfully plausible ground that he would claim all the good for himself and leave all the bad for her. They corresponded during her first absence abroad. The common sense is all on the lady's side, whilst Pope puts on his most elaborate manners and addresses her in the strained compliments of old-fashioned gallantry. He acts the lover, though it is obviously mere acting, and his language is stained by indelicacies, which could scarcely offend Lady Mary, if we may judge her by her own poetical attempts. The most characteristic of Pope's letters related to an incident at Stanton Harcourt. Two rustic lovers were surprised by a thunderstorm in a field near the house; they were struck by lightning, and found lying dead in each other's arms. Here was an admirable chance for Pope, who was staying in the house with his friend Gay. He wrote off a beautiful letter to Lady Mary,[1] descriptive of the event—a true prose pastoral in the Strephon and Chloe style. He got Lord Harcourt to erect a monument over the common grave of the lovers, and composed a couple of epitaphs, which he submitted to Lady Mary's opinion. She replied by a cruel dose of common sense, and a doggerel epitaph, which turned his fine phrases into merciless ridicule. If the lovers had been spared, she suggests, the first year might

[1] Pope, after his quarrel, wanted to sink his previous intimacy with Lady Mary, and printed this letter as addressed by Gay to Fortescue, adding one to the innumerable mystifications of his correspondence. Mr. Moy Thomas doubts also whether Lady Mary's answer was really sent at the assigned date. The contrast of sentiment is equally characteristic in any case.

probably have seen a beaten wife and a deceived husband, cursing their marriage chain.

> "Now they are happy in their doom,
> For Pope has writ upon their tomb."

On Lady Mary's return the intimacy was continued. She took a house at Twickenham. He got Kneller to paint her portrait, and wrote letters expressive of humble adoration. But the tone which did well enough when the pair were separated by the whole breadth of Europe, was less suitable when they were in the same parish. After a time the intimacy faded and changed into mutual antipathy. The specific cause of the quarrel, if cause there was, has not been clearly revealed. One account, said to come from Lady Mary, is at least not intrinsically[1] improbable. According to this story, the unfortunate poet forgot for a moment that he was a contemptible cripple, and forgot also the existence of Mr. Edward Wortley Montagu, and a passionate declaration of love drew from the lady an "immoderate fit of laughter." Ever afterwards, it is added, he was her implacable enemy. Doubtless, if the story be true, Lady Mary acted like a sensible woman of the world, and Pope was silly as well as immoral. And yet one cannot refuse some pity to the unfortunate wretch, thus roughly jerked back into the consciousness that a fine lady might make a pretty plaything of him, but could not seriously regard him with anything but scorn. Whatever the precise facts, a breach of some sort might have been antici-

[1] Mr. Moy Thomas, in his edition of Lady Mary's letters, considers this story to be merely an echo of old scandal, and makes a different conjecture as to the immediate cause of quarrel. His conjecture seems very improbable to me; but the declaration story is clearly of very doubtful authenticity.

pated. A game of gallantry in which the natural parts are inverted, and the gentleman acts the sentimentalist to the lady's performance of the shrewd cynic, is likely to have awkward results. Pope brooded over his resentment, and years afterwards took a revenge only too characteristic. The first of his imitations of Horace appeared in 1733. It contained a couplet, too gross for quotation, making the most outrageous imputation upon the character of "Sappho." Now, the accusation itself had no relation whatever either to facts or even (as I suppose) to any existing scandal. It was simply throwing filth at random. Thus, when Lady Mary took it to herself, and applied to Pope through Peterborough for an explanation, Pope could make a defence verbally impregnable. There was no reason why Lady Mary should fancy that such a cap fitted; and it was far more appropriate, as he added, to other women notorious for immorality as well as authorship. In fact, however, there can be no doubt that Pope intended his abuse to reach its mark. Sappho was an obvious name for the most famous of poetic ladies. Pope himself, in one of his last letters to her, says that fragments of her writing would please him like fragments of Sappho's; and their mediator, Peterborough, writes of her under the same name in some complimentary and once well-known verses to Mrs. Howard. Pope had himself alluded to her as Sappho in some verses addressed (about 1722) to another lady, Judith Cowper, afterwards Mrs. Madan, who was for a time the object of some of his artificial gallantry. The only thing that can be said is that his abuse was a sheer piece of Billingsgate, too devoid of plausibility to be more than an expression of virulent hatred. He was like a dirty boy who throws mud from

an ambush, and declares that he did not see the victim bespattered.[1]

A bitter and humiliating quarrel followed. Lord Hervey, who had been described as "Lord Fanny," in the same satire, joined with his friend, Lady Mary, in writing lampoons upon Pope. The best known was a copy of verses, chiefly, if not exclusively, by Lady Mary, in which Pope is brutally taunted with the personal deformities of his "wretched little carcase," which, it seems, are the only cause of his being "unwhipt, unblanketed, unkicked." One verse seems to have stung him more deeply, which says that his "crabbed numbers" are

"Hard as his heart and as his birth obscure."

To this and other assaults Pope replied by a long letter, suppressed, however, for the time, which, as Johnson says, exhibits to later readers "nothing but tedious malignity," and is, in fact, a careful raking together of everything likely to give pain to his victim. It was not published till 1751, when both Pope and Hervey were dead. In his later writings he made references to Sappho, which fixed the name upon her, and amongst other pleasant in-

[1] Another couplet in the second book of the *Dunciad* about "hapless Monsieur" and "Lady Maries," was also applied at the time to Lady M. W. Montagu: and Pope in a later note affects to deny, thus really pointing the allusion. But the obvious meaning of the whole passage is that "duchesses and Lady Maries" might be personated by abandoned women, which would certainly be unpleasant for them, but does not imply any imputation upon their character. If Lady Mary was really the author of a "Pop upon Pope"—a story of Pope's supposed whipping in the vein of his own attack upon Dennis, she already considered him as the author of some scandal. The line in the *Dunciad* was taken to allude to a story about a M. Rémond which has been fully cleared up.

sinuations, speaks of a weakness which she shared with Dr. Johnson—an inadequate appreciation of clean linen. More malignant accusations are implied both in his acknowledged and anonymous writings. The most ferocious of all his assaults, however, is the character of Sporus, that is, Lord Hervey, in the epistle to Arbuthnot, where he seems to be actually screaming with malignant fury. He returns the taunts as to effeminacy, and calls his adversary a "mere white curd of asses' milk,"—an innocent drink, which he was himself in the habit of consuming.

We turn gladly from these miserable hostilities, disgraceful to all concerned. Were any excuse available for Pope, it would be in the brutality of taunts, coming not only from rough dwellers in Grub-street, but from the most polished representatives of the highest classes, upon personal defects, which the most ungenerous assailant might surely have spared. But it must also be granted that Pope was neither the last to give provocation, nor at all inclined to refrain from the use of poisoned weapons.

The other connexion of which I have spoken has also its mystery—like everything else in Pope's career. Pope had been early acquainted with Teresa and Martha Blount. Teresa was born in the same year as Pope, and Martha two years later.[1] They were daughters of Lister Blount, of Mapledurham; and after his death, in 1710, and the marriage of their only brother, in 1711, they lived with

[1] The statements as to the date of the acquaintance are contradictory. Martha told Spence that she first knew Pope as a "very little girl," but added that it was after the publication of the *Essay on Criticism*, when she was twenty-one; and at another time, that it was after he had begun the Iliad, which was later than part of the published correspondence.

their mother in London, and passed much of the summer near Twickenham. They seem to have been lively young women who had been educated at Paris. Teresa was the most religious, and the greatest lover of London society. I have already quoted a passage or two from the early letters addressed to the two sisters. It has also to be said that he was guilty of writing to them stuff which it is inconceivable that any decent man should have communicated to a modest woman. They do not seem to have taken offence. He professes himself the slave of both alternately or together. "Even from my infancy," he says (in 1714), "I have been in love with one or other of you week by week, and my journey to Bath fell out in the 376th week of the reign of my sovereign lady Sylvia. At the present writing hereof, it is the 389th week of the reign of your most serene majesty, in whose service I was listed some weeks before I beheld your sister." He had suggested to Lady Mary that the concluding lines of *Eloisa* contained a delicate compliment to her; and he characteristically made a similar insinuation to Martha Blount about the same passage. Pope was decidedly an economist even of his compliments. Some later letters are in less artificial language, and there is a really touching and natural letter to Teresa in regard to an illness of her sister's. After a time, we find that some difficulty has arisen. He feels that his presence gives pain; when he comes he either makes her (apparently Teresa) uneasy, or he sees her unkind. Teresa, it would seem, is jealous, and disapproves of his attentions to Martha. In the midst of this we find that in 1717 Pope settled an annuity upon Teresa of 40*l.* a year for six years, on condition of her not being married during that time. The fact has suggested various speculations, but was, perhaps, only a part of some

family arrangement, made convenient by the diminished fortunes of the ladies. Whatever the history, Pope gradually became attached to Martha, and simultaneously came to regard Teresa with antipathy. Martha, in fact, became by degrees almost a member of his household. His correspondents take for granted that she is his regular companion. He writes of her to Gay, in 1730, as "a friend —a woman friend, God help me! — with whom I have spent three or four hours a day these fifteen years." In his last years, when he was most dependent upon kindness, he seems to have expected that she should be invited to any house which he was himself to visit. Such a close connexion naturally caused some scandal. In 1725 he defends himself against "villanous lying tales" of this kind to his old friend Caryll, with whom the Blounts were connected. At the same time he is making bitter complaints of Teresa. He accused her afterwards (1729) of having an intrigue with a married man, of "striking, pinching, and abusing her mother to the utmost shamefulness." The mother, he thinks, is too meek to resent this tyranny, and Martha, as it appears, refuses to believe the reports against her sister. Pope audaciously suggests that it would be a good thing if the mother could be induced to retire to a convent, and is anxious to persuade Martha to leave so painful a home. The same complaints reappear in many letters, but the position remained unaltered. It is impossible to say with any certainty what may have been the real facts. Pope's mania for suspicion deprives his suggestions of the slightest value. The only inference to be drawn is, that he drew closer to Martha Blount as years went by, and was anxious that she should become independent of her family. This naturally led to mutual dislike and suspicion,

but nobody can now say whether Teresa pinched her mother, nor what would have been her account of Martha's relations to Pope.

Johnson repeats a story that Martha neglected Pope "with shameful unkindness," in his later years. It is clearly exaggerated or quite unfounded. At any rate, the poor sickly man, in his premature and childless old age, looked up to her with fond affection, and left to her nearly the whole of his fortune. His biographers have indulged in discussions—surely superfluous—as to the morality of the connexion. There is no question of seduction, or of tampering with the affections of an innocent woman. Pope was but too clearly disqualified from acting the part of Lothario. There was not in his case any Vanessa to give a tragic turn to the connexion, which otherwise resembled Swift's connexion with Stella. Miss Blount, from all that appears, was quite capable of taking care of herself, and, had she wished for marriage, need only have intimated her commands to her lover. It is probable enough that the relations between them led to very unpleasant scenes in her family; but she did not suffer otherwise in accepting Pope's attentions. The probability seems to be that the friendship had become imperceptibly closer, and that what began as an idle affectation of gallantry was slowly changed into a devoted attachment, but not until Pope's health was so broken that marriage would then, if not always, have appeared to be a mockery.

Poets have a bad reputation as husbands. Strong passions and keen sensibilities may easily disqualify a man for domestic tranquillity, and prompt a revolt against rules essential to social welfare. Pope, like other poets from Shakspeare to Shelley, was unfortunate in his love affairs; but his ill-fortune took a characteristic shape. He was

not carried away, like Byron and Burns, by overpowering passions. Rather the emotional power which lay in his nature was prevented from displaying itself by his physical infirmities, and his strange trickiness and morbid irritability. A man who could not make tea without a stratagem, could hardly be a downright lover. We may imagine that he would at once make advances and retract them; that he would be intolerably touchy and suspicious; that every coolness would be interpreted as a deliberate insult, and that the slightest hint would be enough to set his jealousy in a flame. A woman would feel that, whatever his genius and his genuine kindliness, one thing was impossible with him—that is, a real confidence in his sincerity; and therefore, on the whole, it may, perhaps, be reckoned as a piece of good fortune for the most wayward and excitable of sane mankind that, if he never fully gained the most essential condition of all human happiness, he yet formed a deep and lasting attachment to a woman who, more or less, returned his feeling. In a life so full of bitterness, so harassed by physical pain, one is glad to think, even whilst admitting that the suffering was in great part foolish self-torture, and in part inflicted as a retribution for injuries to others, that some glow of feminine kindliness might enlighten the dreary stages of his progress through life. The years left to him after the death of his mother were few and evil, and it would be hard to grudge him such consolation as he could receive from the glances of Patty Blount's blue eyes—the eyes which, on Walpole's testimony, were the last remains of her beauty.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAR WITH THE DUNCES.

In the *Dunciad*, published soon after the Odyssey, Pope laments ten years spent as a commentator and translator. He was not without compensation. The drudgery—for the latter part of his task must have been felt as drudgery —once over, he found himself in a thoroughly independent position, still on the right side of forty, and able to devote his talents to any task which might please him. The task which he actually chose was not calculated to promote his happiness. We must look back to an earlier period to explain its history. During the last years of Queen Anne, Pope had belonged to a "little senate" in which Swift was the chief figure. Though Swift did not exercise either so gentle or so imperial a sway as Addison, the cohesion between the more independent members of this rival clique was strong and lasting. They amused themselves by projecting the Scriblerus Club, a body which never had, it would seem, any definite organization, but was held to exist for the prosecution of a design never fully executed. Martinus Scriblerus was the name of an imaginary pedant—a precursor and relative of Dr. Dryasdust—whose memoirs and works were to form a satire upon stupidity in the guise of learning. The various members of the club were to share in the compilation; and if such joint-stock undertakings were practicable in

literature, it would be difficult to collect a more brilliant set of contributors. After Swift—the terrible humourist of whom we can hardly think without a mixture of horror and compassion—the chief members were Atterbury, Arbuthnot, Gay, Parnell, and Pope himself. Parnell, an amiable man, died in 1717, leaving works which were edited by Pope in 1722. Atterbury, a potential Wolsey or Laud born in an uncongenial period, was a man of fine literary taste—a warm admirer of Milton (though he did exhort Pope to put *Samson Agonistes* into civilised costume —one of the most unlucky suggestions ever made by mortal man), a judicious critic of Pope himself, and one who had already given proofs of his capacity in literary warfare by his share in the famous controversy with Bentley. Though no one now doubts the measureless superiority of Bentley, the clique of Swift and Pope still cherished the belief that the wit of Atterbury and his allies had triumphed over the ponderous learning of the pedant. Arbuthnot, whom Swift had introduced to Pope as a man who could do everything but walk, was an amiable and accomplished physician. He was a strong Tory and High-Churchman, and retired for a time to France upon the death of Anne and the overthrow of his party. He returned, however, to England, resumed his practice, and won Pope's warmest gratitude by his skill and care. He was a man of learning, and had employed it in an attack upon Woodward's geological speculations, as already savouring of heterodoxy. He possessed also a vein of genuine humour, resembling that of Swift, though it has rather lost its savour, perhaps, because it was not salted by the Dean's misanthropic bitterness. If his good humour weakened his wit, it gained him the affections of his friends, and was never soured by the sufferings of his later years. Finally, John Gay, though

fat, lazy, and wanting in manliness of spirit, had an illimitable flow of good-tempered banter; and if he could not supply the learning of Arbuthnot, he could give what was more valuable, touches of fresh natural simplicity, which still explain the liking of his friends. Gay, as Johnson says, was the general favourite of the wits, though a playfellow rather than a partner, and treated with more fondness than respect. Pope seems to have loved him better than any one, and was probably soothed by his easy-going, unsuspicious temper. They were of the same age; and Gay, who had been apprenticed to a linen-draper, managed to gain notice by his poetical talents, and was taken up by various great people. Pope said of him that he wanted independence of spirit, which is indeed obvious enough. He would have been a fitting inmate of Thomson's Castle of Indolence. He was one of those people who consider that Providence is bound to put food into their mouths without giving them any trouble; and, as sometimes happens, his draft upon the general system of things was honoured. He was made comfortable by various patrons; the Duchess of Queensberry petted him in his later years, and the duke kept his money for him. His friends chose to make a grievance of the neglect of Government to add to his comfort by a good place; they encouraged him to refuse the only place offered as not sufficiently dignified; and he even became something of a martyr when his *Polly*, a sequel to the *Beggars' Opera*, was prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain, and a good subscription made him ample amends. Pope has immortalized the complaint by lamenting the fate of "neglected genius" in the *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, and declaring that the "sole return" of all Gay's "blameless life" was

> "My verse and Queensberry weeping o'er thy urn."

Pope's alliance with Gay had various results. Gay continued the war with Ambrose Philips by writing burlesque pastorals, of which Johnson truly says that they show "the effect of reality and truth, even when the intention was to show them grovelling and degraded." They may still be glanced at with pleasure. Soon after the publication of the mock pastorals, the two friends, in company with Arbuthnot, had made an adventure more in the spirit of the Scriblerus Club. A farce called *Three Hours after Marriage* was produced and damned in 1717. It was intended (amongst other things) to satirize Pope's old enemy Dennis, called "Sir Tremendous," as an embodiment of pedantic criticism, and Arbuthnot's old antagonist Woodward. A taste for fossils, mummies or antiquities was at that time regarded as a fair butt for unsparing ridicule; but the three great wits managed their assault so clumsily as to become ridiculous themselves; and Pope, as we shall presently see, smarted as usual under failure.

After Swift's retirement to Ireland, and during Pope's absorption in Homer, the Scriblerus Club languished. Some fragments, however, of the great design were executed by the four chief members, and the dormant project was revived, after Pope had finished his Homer, on occasion of the last two visits of Swift to England. He passed six months in England, from March to August, 1726, and had brought with him the MS. of Gulliver's Travels, the greatest satire produced by the Scriblerians. He passed a great part of his time at Twickenham, and in rambling with Pope or Gay about the country. Those who do not know how often the encounter of brilliant wits tends to neutralize rather than stimulate their activity, may wish to have been present at a dinner which took place at Twickenham on July 6, 1726, when the party was made up of

Pope, the most finished poet of the day; Swift, the deepest humourist; Bolingbroke, the most brilliant politician; Congreve, the wittiest writer of comedy; and Gay, the author of the most successful burlesque. The envious may console themselves by thinking that Pope very likely went to sleep, that Swift was deaf and overbearing, that Congreve and Bolingbroke were painfully witty, and Gay frightened into silence. When, in 1727, Swift again visited England, and stayed at Twickenham, the clouds were gathering. The scene is set before us in some of Swift's verses:—

"Pope has the talent well to speak,
But not to reach the ear;
His loudest voice is low and weak,
The dean too deaf to hear.

"Awhile they on each other look,
Then different studies choose;
The dean sits plodding o'er a book,
Pope walks and courts the muse."

"Two sick friends," says Swift in a letter written after his return to Ireland, "never did well together." It is plain that their infirmities had been mutually trying, and on the last day of August Swift suddenly withdrew from Twickenham, in spite of Pope's entreaties. He had heard of the last illness of Stella, which was finally to crush his happiness. Unable to endure the company of friends, he went to London in very bad health, and thence, after a short stay, to Ireland, leaving behind him a letter which, says Pope, "affected me so much that it made me like a girl." It was a gloomy parting, and the last. The stern Dean retired to die "like a poisoned rat in a hole," after long years of bitterness, and finally of slow intellectual decay. He always retained perfect confidence in his friend's

affection. Poor Pope, as he says in the verses on his own death,—

> "Will grieve a month, and Gay
> A week, and Arbuthnot a day;"

and they were the only friends to whom he attributes sincere sorrow.

Meanwhile two volumes of *Miscellanies*, the joint work of the four wits, appeared in June, 1727; and a third in March, 1728. A fourth, hastily got up, was published in 1732. They do not appear to have been successful. The copyright of the three volumes was sold for 225*l.*, of which Arbuthnot and Gay received each 50*l.*, whilst the remainder was shared between Pope and Swift; and Swift seems to have given his part, according to his custom, to the widow of a respectable Dublin bookseller. Pope's correspondence with the publisher shows that he was entrusted with the financial details, and arranged them with the sharpness of a practised man of business. The whole collection was made up in great part of old scraps, and savoured of bookmaking, though Pope speaks complacently of the joint volumes, in which he says to Swift, "We look like friends, side by side, serious and merry by turns, conversing interchangeably, and walking down, hand in hand, to posterity." Of the various fragments contributed by Pope, there is only one which need be mentioned here—the treatise on Bathos in the third volume, in which he was helped by Arbuthnot. He told Swift privately that he had "entirely methodized and in a manner written it all," though he afterwards chose to denounce the very same statement as a lie when the treatise brought him into trouble. It is the most amusing of his prose writings, consisting essentially of a collection of absurdities from various authors, with some apparently invented for the occasion, such as the familiar

"Ye gods, annihilate but space and time,
And make two lovers happy!"

and ending with the ingenious receipt to make an epic poem. Most of the passages ridiculed—and, it must be said, very deservedly—were selected from some of the various writers to whom, for one reason or another, he owed a grudge. Ambrose Philips and Dennis, his old enemies, and Theobald, who had criticised his edition of Shakspeare, supply several illustrations. Blackmore had spoken very strongly of the immorality of the wits in some prose essays; Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, and a parody of the first psalm, anonymously circulated, but known to be Pope's, had been severely condemned; and Pope took a cutting revenge by plentiful citations from Blackmore's most ludicrous bombast; and even Broome, his colleague in Homer, came in for a passing stroke, for Broome and Pope were now at enmity. Finally, Pope fired a general volley into the whole crowd of bad authors by grouping them under the head of various animals—tortoises, parrots, frogs, and so forth—and adding under each head the initials of the persons described. He had the audacity to declare that the initials were selected at random. If so, a marvellous coincidence made nearly every pair of letters correspond to the name and surname of some contemporary poetaster. The classification was rather vague, but seems to have given special offence.

Meanwhile Pope was planning a more elaborate campaign against his adversaries. He now appeared for the first time as a formal satirist, and the *Dunciad*, in which he came forward as the champion of Wit, taken in its broad sense, against its natural antithesis, Dulness, is in some respects his masterpiece. It is addressed to Swift, who probably assisted at some of its early stages. O thou, exclaims the poet—

> "O thou, whatever title please thine ear,
> Dean, Drapier, Bickerstaff, or Gulliver!
> Whether thou choose Cervantes' serious air,
> Or laugh and shake in Rabelais's easy-chair—"

And we feel that Swift is present in spirit throughout the composition. "The great fault of the *Dunciad*," says Warton, an intelligent and certainly not an over-severe critic, "is the excessive vehemence of the satire. It has been compared," he adds, "to the geysers propelling a vast column of boiling water by the force of subterranean fire;" and he speaks of some one who, after reading a book of the *Dunciad*, always soothes himself by a canto of the *Faery Queen*. Certainly a greater contrast could not easily be suggested; and yet I think that the remark requires at least modification. The *Dunciad*, indeed, is, beyond all question, full of coarse abuse. The second book, in particular, illustrates that strange delight in the physically disgusting which Johnson notices as characteristic of Pope and his master, Swift. In the letter prefixed to the *Dunciad*, Pope tries to justify his abuse of his enemies by the example of Boileau, whom he appears to have considered as his great prototype. But Boileau would have been revolted by the brutal images which Pope does not hesitate to introduce; and it is a curious phenomenon that the poet who is pre-eminently the representative of polished society should openly take such pleasure in unmixed filth. Polish is sometimes very thin. It has been suggested that Swift, who was with Pope during the composition, may have been directly responsible for some of these brutalities. At any rate, as I have said, Pope has here been working in the Swift spirit, and this gives, I think, the key-note of his *Dunciad*.

The geyser comparison is so far misleading that Pope

is not in his most spiteful mood. There is not that infusion of personal venom which appears so strongly in the character of Sporus and similar passages. In reading them we feel that the poet is writhing under some bitter mortification, and trying with concentrated malice to sting his adversary in the tenderest places. We hear a tortured victim screaming out the shrillest taunts at his tormentor. The abuse in the *Dunciad* is by comparison broad and even jovial. The tone at which Pope is aiming is that suggested by the "laughing and shaking in Rabelais's easy-chair." It is meant to be a boisterous guffaw from capacious lungs, an enormous explosion of superlative contempt for the mob of stupid thick-skinned scribblers. They are to be overwhelmed with gigantic cachinnations, ducked in the dirtiest of drains, rolled over and over with rough horse-play, pelted with the least savoury of rotten eggs, not skilfully anatomized or pierced with dexterously directed needles. Pope has really stood by too long, watching their tiresome antics and receiving their taunts, and he must, once for all, speak out and give them a lesson.

> "Out with it, Dunciad! let the secret pass,
> That secret to each fool—that he's an ass!"

That is his account of his feelings in the prologue to the *Satires*, and he answers the probable remonstrance.

> "You think this cruel? Take it for a rule,
> No creature smarts so little as a fool."

To reconcile us to such laughter, it should have a more genial tone than Pope could find in his nature. We ought to feel, and we certainly do not feel, that after the joke has been fired off there should be some possibility of reconciliation, or, at least, we should find some recognition of the

fact that the victims are not to be hated simply because they were not such clever fellows as Pope. There is something cruel in Pope's laughter, as in Swift's. The missiles are not mere filth, but are weighted with hard materials that bruise and mangle. He professes that his enemies were the first aggressors, a plea which can be only true in part; and he defends himself, feebly enough, against the obvious charge that he has ridiculed men for being obscure, poor, and stupid—faults not to be amended by satire, nor rightfully provocative of enmity. In fact, Pope knows in his better moments that a man is not necessarily wicked because he sleeps on a bulk, or writes verses in a garret; but he also knows that to mention those facts will give his enemies pain, and he cannot refrain from the use of so handy a weapon.

Such faults make one half ashamed of confessing to reading the *Dunciad* with pleasure; and yet it is frequently written with such force and freedom that we half pardon the cruel little persecutor, and admire the vigour with which he throws down the gauntlet to the natural enemies of genius. The *Dunciad* is modelled upon the Mac Flecknoe, in which Dryden celebrates the appointment of Elkanah Shadwell to succeed Flecknoe as monarch of the realms of Dulness, and describes the coronation ceremonies. Pope imitates many passages, and adopts the general design. Though he does not equal the vigour of some of Dryden's lines, and wages war in a more ungenerous spirit, the *Dunciad* has a wider scope than its original, and shows Pope's command of his weapons in occasional felicitous phrases, in the vigour of the versification, and in the general sense of form and clear presentation of the scene imagined. For a successor to the great empire of Dulness he chose (in the original form of

the poem) the unlucky Theobald, a writer to whom the merit is attributed of having first illustrated Shakspeare by a study of the contemporary literature. In doing this he had fallen foul of Pope, who could claim no such merit for his own editorial work, and Pope, therefore, regarded him as a grovelling antiquarian. As such, he was a fit pretender enough to the throne once occupied by Settle. The *Dunciad* begins by a spirited description of the goddess brooding in her cell upon the eve of a Lord Mayor's day, when the proud scene was o'er,

> "But lived in Settle's numbers one day more."

The predestined hero is meanwhile musing in his Gothic library, and addresses a solemn invocation to Dulness, who accepts his sacrifice—a pile of his own works—transports him to her temple, and declares him to be the legitimate successor to the former rulers of her kingdom. The second book describes the games held in honour of the new ruler. Some of them are, as a frank critic observes, "beastly;" but a brief report of the least objectionable may serve as a specimen of the whole performance. Dulness, with her court descends

> "To where Fleet Ditch with disemboguing streams
> Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,
> The king of dykes than whom no sluice of mud
> With deeper sable blots the silver flood.—
> Here strip, my children, here at once leap in;
> Here prove who best can dash through thick and thin,
> And who the most in love of dirt excel."

And, certainly by the poet's account, they all love it as well as their betters. The competitors in this contest are drawn from the unfortunates immersed in what Warburton calls "the common sink of all such writers (as

Ralph)—a political newspaper." They were all hateful, partly because they were on the side of Walpole, and therefore, by Pope's logic, unprincipled hirelings, and more, because in that cause, as others, they had assaulted Pope and his friend. There is Oldmixon, a hack writer employed in compilations, who accused Atterbury of falsifying Clarendon, and was accused of himself falsifying historical documents in the interests of Whiggism; and Smedley, an Irish clergyman, a special enemy of Swift's, who had just printed a collection of assaults upon the miscellanies called Gulliveriana; and Concanen, another Irishman, an ally of Theobald's, and (it may be noted) of Warburton's, who attacked the *Bathos*, and received—of course, for the worst services—an appointment in Jamaica; and Arnall, one of Walpole's most favoured journalists, who was said to have received for himself or others near 11,000*l.* in four years. Each dives in a way supposed to be characteristic, Oldmixon with the pathetic exclamation,

> "And am I now threescore?
> Ah, why, ye gods, should two and two make four?"

Concanen, "a cold, long-winded native of the deep," dives perseveringly, but without causing a ripple in the stream:

> "Not so bold Arnall—with a weight of skull
> Furious he dives, precipitately dull,"

and ultimately emerges to claim the prize, "with half the bottom on his head." But Smedley, who has been given up for lost, comes up,

> "Shaking the horrors of his sable brows,"

and relates how he has been sucked in by the mud-nymphs, and how they have shown him a branch of Styx which

here pours into the Thames, and diffuses its soporific vapours over the temple and its purlieus. He is solemnly welcomed by Milbourn (a reverend antagonist of Dryden), who tells him to "receive these robes which once were mine,"

> "Dulness is sacred in a sound divine."

The games are concluded in the second book; and in the third the hero, sleeping in the Temple of Dulness, meets in a vision the ghost of Settle, who reveals to him the future of his empire; tells how Dulness is to overspread the world, and revive the triumphs of Goths and monks; how the hated Dennis, and Gildon, and others, are to overwhelm scorners, and set up at court, and preside over arts and sciences, though a fit of temporary sanity causes him to give a warning to the deists—

> "But learn, ye dunces! not to scorn your God—"

and how posterity is to witness the decay of the stage, under a deluge of silly farce, opera, and sensation dramas; how bad architects are to deface the works of Wren and Inigo Jones; whilst the universities and public schools are to be given up to games and idleness, and the birch is to be abolished.

Fragments of the prediction have not been entirely falsified, though the last couplet intimates a hope:

> "Enough! enough! the raptured monarch cries,
> And through the ivory gate the vision flies."

The *Dunciad* was thus a declaration of war against the whole tribe of scribblers; and, like other such declarations, it brought more consequences than Pope foresaw. It introduced Pope to a very dangerous line of conduct. Swift had written to Pope in 1725: "Take care that the

bad poets do not outwit you, as they have served the good ones in every age, whom they have provoked to transmit their names to posterity;" and the *Dunciad* has been generally censured from Swift's point of view. Satire, it is said, is wasted upon such insignificant persons. To this Pope might have replied, with some plausibility, that the interest of satire must always depend upon its internal qualities, not upon our independent knowledge of its object. Though Gildon and Arnall are forgotten, the type "dunce" is eternal. The warfare, however, was demoralizing in another sense. Whatever may have been the injustice of Pope's attacks upon individuals, the moral standard of the Grub-street population was far from exalted. The poor scribbler had too many temptations to sell himself, and to evade the occasional severity of the laws of libel by humiliating contrivances. Moreover, the uncertainty of the law of copyright encouraged the lower class of booksellers to undertake all kinds of piratical enterprises, and to trade in various ways upon the fame of well-known authors, by attributing trash to them, or purloining and publishing what the authors would have suppressed. Dublin was to London what New York is now, and successful books were at once reproduced in Ireland. Thus the lower strata of the literary class frequently practised with impunity all manner of more or less discreditable trickery, and Pope, with his morbid propensity for mystification, was only too apt a pupil in such arts. Though the tone of his public utterances was always of the loftiest, he was like a civilized commander who, in carrying on a war with savages, finds it convenient to adopt the practices which he professes to disapprove.

The whole publication of the *Dunciad* was surrounded with tricks, intended partly to evade possible conse-

quences, and partly to excite public interest, or to cause amusement at the expense of the bewildered victims. Part of the plot was concerted with Swift, who, however, does not appear to have been quite in the secret. The complete poem was intended to appear with an elaborate mock commentary by Scriblerus, explaining some of the allusions, and with "proeme, prolegomena, testimonia scriptorum, index auctorum, and notæ variorum." In the first instance, however, it appeared in a mangled form without this burlesque apparatus or the lines to Swift. Four editions were issued in this form in 1728, and with a mock notice from the publisher, expressing a hope that the author would be provoked to give a more perfect edition. This, accordingly, appeared in 1729. Pope seems to have been partly led to this device by a principle which he avowed to Warburton. When he had anything specially sharp to say he kept it for a second edition, where it would, he thought, pass with less offence. But he may also have been under the impression that all the mystery of apparently spurious editions would excite public curiosity. He adopted other devices for avoiding unpleasant consequences. It was possible that his victims might appeal to the law. In order to throw dust in their eyes, two editions appeared in Dublin and London—the Dublin edition professing to be a reprint from a London edition, whilst the London edition professed in the same way to be the reprint of a Dublin edition. To oppose another obstacle to prosecutors, he assigned the *Dunciad* to three noblemen—Lords Bathurst, Burlington, and Oxford—who transferred their right to Pope's publisher. Pope would be sheltered behind these responsible persons, and an aggrieved person might be slower to attack persons of high position and property. By yet another device Pope ap-

plied for an injunction in Chancery to suppress a piratical London edition; but ensured the failure of his application by not supplying the necessary proofs of property. This trick, repeated, as we shall see, on another occasion, was intended either to shirk responsibility or to increase the notoriety of the book. A further mystification was equally characteristic. To the *Dunciad* in its enlarged form is prefixed a letter, really written by Pope himself, but praising his morality and genius, and justifying his satire in terms which would have been absurd in Pope's own mouth. He therefore induced a Major Cleland, a retired officer of some position, to put his name to the letter, which it is possible that he may have partly written. The device was transparent, and only brought ridicule upon its author. Finally, Pope published an account of the publication in the name of Savage, known by Johnson's biography, who seems to have been a humble ally of the great man—at once a convenient source of information and a tool for carrying on this underground warfare. Pope afterwards incorporated this statement—which was meant to prove, by some palpable falsehoods, that the dunces had not been the aggressors—in his own notes, without Savage's name. This labyrinth of unworthy devices was more or less visible to Pope's antagonists. It might in some degree be excusable as a huge practical joke, absurdly elaborate for the purpose, but it led Pope into some slippery ways, where no such excuse is available.

Pope, says Johnson, contemplated his victory over the dunces with great exultation. Through his mouth-piece, Savage, he described the scene on the day of publication; how a crowd of authors besieged the shop and threatened him with violence; how the booksellers and hawkers

struggled with small success for copies; how the dunces formed clubs to devise measures of retaliation; how one wrote to ministers to denounce Pope as a traitor, and another brought an image in clay to execute him in effigy; and how successive editions, genuine and spurious, followed each other, distinguished by an owl or an ass on the frontispiece, and provoking infinite controversy amongst rival vendors. It is unpleasant to have ugly names hurled at one by the first writer of the day; but the abuse was for the most part too general to be libellous. Nor would there be any great interest now in exactly distributing the blame between Pope and his enemies. A word or two may be said of one of the most conspicuous quarrels.

Aaron Hill was a fussy and ambitious person, full of literary and other schemes; devising a plan for extracting oil from beech-nuts, and writing a Pindaric ode on the occasion; felling forests in the Highlands to provide timber for the navy; and, as might be inferred, spending instead of making a fortune. He was a stage-manager, translated Voltaire's *Merope*, wrote words for Handel's first composition in England, wrote unsuccessful plays, a quantity of unreadable poetry, and corresponded with most of the literary celebrities. Pope put his initials, A. H., under the head of "Flying Fishes," in the *Bathos*, as authors who now and then rise upon their fins and fly, but soon drop again to the profound. In the *Dunciad* he reappeared amongst the divers.

> "Then * * tried, but hardly snatch'd from sight
> Instant buoys up, and rises into light:
> He bears no token of the sable streams,
> And mounts far off amongst the swans of Thames."

A note applied the lines to Hill, with whom he had had a

former misunderstanding. Hill replied to these assaults by a ponderous satire in verse upon "tuneful Alexis;" it had, however, some tolerable lines at the opening, imitated from Pope's own verses upon Addison, and attributing to him the same jealousy of merit in others. Hill soon afterwards wrote a civil note to Pope, complaining of the passage in the *Dunciad*. Pope might have relied upon the really satisfactory answer that the lines were, on the whole, complimentary; indeed, more complimentary than true. But with his natural propensity for lying, he resorted to his old devices. In answer to this and a subsequent letter, in which Hill retorted with unanswerable force, Pope went on to declare that he was not the author of the notes, that the extracts had been chosen at random, that he would "use his influence with the editors of the *Dunciad* to get the notes altered;" and, finally, by an ingenious evasion, pointed out that the blank in the *Dunciad* required to be filled up by a dissyllable. This, in the form of the lines as quoted above, is quite true, but in the first edition of the *Dunciad* the first verse had been

"H—— tried the next, but hardly snatch'd from sight."

Hill did not detect this specimen of what Pope somewhere calls "pretty genteel equivocation." He was reconciled to Pope, and taught the poor poet by experience that his friendship was worse than his enmity. He wrote him letters of criticism; he forced poor Pope to negotiate for him with managers and to bring distinguished friends to the performances of his dreary plays; nay, to read through, or to say that he had read through, one of them in manuscript four times, and make corrections mixed with elaborate eulogy. No doubt Pope came to regard a letter from Hill with terror, though Hill compared him to Horace and

Juvenal, and hoped that he would live till the virtues which his spirit would propagate became as general as the esteem of his genius. In short, Hill, who was a florid flatterer, is so complimentary that we are not surprised to find him telling Richardson, after Pope's death, that the poet's popularity was due to a certain "bladdery swell of management." "But," he concludes, "rest his memory in peace! It will very rarely be disturbed by that time he himself is ashes."

The war raged for some time. Dennis, Smedley, Moore-Smythe, Welsted, and others, retorted by various pamphlets, the names of which were published by Pope in an appendix to future editions of the *Dunciad*, by way of proving that his own blows had told. Lady Mary was credited, perhaps unjustly, with an abusive performance called a "Pop upon Pope," relating how Pope had been soundly whipped by a couple of his victims—of course a pure fiction. Some such vengeance, however, was seriously threatened. As Pope was dining one day at Lord Bathurst's, the servant brought in the agreeable message that a young man was waiting for Mr. Pope in the lane outside, and that the young man's name was Dennis. He was the son of the critic, and prepared to avenge his father's wrongs; but Bathurst persuaded him to retire, without the glory of thrashing a cripple. Reports of such possibilities were circulated, and Pope thought it prudent to walk out with his big Danish dog Bounce and a pair of pistols. Spence tried to persuade the little man not to go out alone, but Pope declared that he would not go a step out of his way for such villains, and that it was better to die than to live in fear of them. He continued, indeed, to give fresh provocation. A weekly paper, called the *Grub-street Journal*, was started in January, 1730, and continued to appear till

the end of 1737. It included a continuous series of epigrams and abuse, in the Scriblerian vein, and aimed against the heroes of the *Dunciad*, amongst whom poor James Moore-Smythe seems to have had the largest share of abuse. It was impossible, however, for Pope, busied as he was in literature and society, and constantly out of health, to be the efficient editor of such a performance; but though he denied having any concern in it, it is equally out of the question that any one really unconnected with Pope should have taken up the huge burden of his quarrels in this fashion. Though he concealed, and on occasions denied his connexion, he no doubt inspired the editors and contributed articles to its pages, especially during its early years. It is a singular fact—or, rather, it would have been singular, had Pope been a man of less abnormal character—that he should have devoted so much energy to this paltry subterranean warfare against the objects of his complex antipathies. Pope was so anxious for concealment, that he kept his secret even from his friendly legal adviser, Fortescue; and Fortescue innocently requested Pope to get up evidence to support a charge of libel against his own organ. The evidence which Pope collected—in defence of a quack-doctor, Ward—was not, as we may suppose, very valuable. Two volumes of the *Grub-street Journal* were printed in 1737, and a fragment or two was admitted by Pope into his works. It is said, in the preface to the collected pieces, that the journal was killed by the growing popularity of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, which is accused of living by plunder. But in truth the reader will infer that, if the selection includes the best pieces, the journal may well have died from congenital weakness.

The *Dunciad* was yet to go through a transformation,

and to lead to a new quarrel; and though this happened at a much later period, it will be most convenient to complete the story here. Pope had formed an alliance with Warburton, of which I shall presently have to speak; and it was under Warburton's influence that he resolved to add a fourth book to the *Dunciad*. This supplement seems to have been really made up of fragments provided for another scheme. The *Essay on Man*—to be presently mentioned—was to be followed by a kind of poetical essay upon the nature and limits of the human understanding, and a satire upon the misapplication of the serious faculties.[1] It was a design manifestly beyond the author's powers; and even the fragment which is turned into the fourth book of the *Dunciad* takes him plainly out of his depth. He was no philosopher, and therefore an incompetent assailant of the abuses of philosophy. The fourth book consists chiefly of ridicule upon pedagogues who teach words instead of things; upon the unlucky "virtuosos" who care for old medals, plants, and butterflies—pursuits which afforded an unceasing supply of ridicule to the essayists of the time; a denunciation of the corruption of modern youth, who learn nothing but new forms of vice in the grand tour; and a fresh assault upon Toland, Tindal, and other freethinkers of the day. There were some passages marked by Pope's usual dexterity, but the whole is awkwardly constructed, and has no very intelligible connexion with the first part. It was highly admired at the time, and, amongst others, by Gray. He specially praises a passage which has often been quoted as representing Pope's highest achievement in his art. At the conclusion the goddess Dulness yawns, and a blight falls

[1] See Pope to Swift, March 25, 1736.

upon art, science, and philosophy. I quote the lines, which Pope himself could not repeat without emotion, and which have received the highest eulogies from Johnson and Thackeray.

"In vain, in vain—the all-composing Hour
Resistless falls; the Muse obeys the Power—
She comes! she comes! the sable throne behold
Of night primeval and of chaos old!
Before her Fancy's gilded clouds decay,
And all its varying rainbows die away.
Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
The meteor drops, and in a flash expires,
As one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
The sickening stars fade off the ethereal plain;
As Argus' eyes by Hermes' wand oppress'd
Closed one by one to everlasting rest;
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after art goes out, and all is night.
See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of casuistry heaped o'er her head!
Philosophy, that lean'd on heaven before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,
And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense!
See Mystery to Mathematics fly!
In vain! They gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.
Religion, blushing, veils her sacred fires,
And unawares Morality expires.
Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored;
Light dies before thy uncreating word;
Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall,
And universal darkness buries all."

The most conspicuous figure in this new *Dunciad* (published March, 1742), is Bentley—taken as the representa-

tive of a pedant rampant. Bentley is, I think, the only man of real genius of whom Pope has spoken in terms implying gross misappreciation. With all his faults, Pope was a really fine judge of literature, and has made fewer blunders than such men as Addison, Gray, and Johnson, infinitely superior to him in generosity of feeling towards the living. He could even appreciate Bentley, and had written, in his copy of Bentley's Milton, "*Pulchre, bene, recte*," against some of the happier emendations in the great critic's most unsuccessful performance. The assault in the *Dunciad* is not the less unsparing and ignorantly contemptuous of scholarship. The explanation is easy. Bentley, who had spoken contemptuously of Pope's Homer, said of Pope, "the portentous cub never forgives." But this was not all. Bentley had provoked enemies by his intense pugnacity almost as freely as Pope by his sneaking malice. Swift and Atterbury, objects of Pope's friendly admiration, had been his antagonists, and Pope would naturally accept their view of his merits. And, moreover, Pope's great ally of this period had a dislike of his own to Bentley. Bentley had said of Warburton that he was a man of monstrous appetite and bad digestion. The remark hit Warburton's most obvious weakness. Warburton, with his imperfect scholarship, and vast masses of badly assimilated learning, was jealous of the reputation of the thoroughly trained and accurate critic. It was the dislike of a charlatan for the excellence which he endeavoured to simulate. Bolingbroke, it may be added, was equally contemptuous in his language about men of learning, and for much the same reason. He depreciated what he could not rival. Pope, always under the influence of some stronger companions, naturally adopted their shallow prejudices, and recklessly abused a writer who should have

been recognized as amongst the most effective combatants against dulness.

Bentley died a few months after the publication of the *Dunciad*. But Pope found a living antagonist, who succeeded in giving him pain enough to gratify the vilified dunces. This was Colley Cibber—most lively and mercurial of actors—author of some successful plays, with too little stuff in them for permanence, and of an Apology for his own Life, which is still exceedingly amusing as well as useful for the history of the stage. He was now approaching seventy, though he was to survive Pope for thirteen years, and as good-tempered a specimen of the lively, if not too particular, old man of the world as could well have been found. Pope owed him a grudge. Cibber, in playing the *Rehearsal*, had introduced some ridicule of the unlucky *Three Hours after Marriage*. Pope, he says, came behind the scenes foaming and choking with fury, and forbidding Cibber ever to repeat the insult. Cibber laughed at him, said that he would repeat it as long as the *Rehearsal* was performed, and kept his word. Pope took his revenge by many incidental hits at Cibber, and Cibber made a good-humoured reference to this abuse in the Apology. Hereupon Pope, in the new *Dunciad*, described him as reclining on the lap of the goddess, and added various personalities in the notes. Cibber straightway published a letter to Pope, the more cutting because still in perfect good-humour, and told the story about the original quarrel. He added an irritating anecdote in order to provoke the poet still further. It described Pope as introduced by Cibber and Lord Warwick to very bad company. The story was one which could only be told by a graceless old representative of the old school of comedy, but it hit its mark. The two Richardsons once found Pope reading

one of Cibber's pamphlets. He said, "These things are my diversion;" but they saw his features writhing with anguish, and young Richardson, as they went home, observed to his father that he hoped to be preserved from such diversions as Pope had enjoyed. The poet resolved to avenge himself, and he did it to the lasting injury of his poem. He dethroned Theobald, who, as a plodding antiquarian, was an excellent exponent of dulness, and installed Cibber in his place, who might be a representative of folly, but was as little of a dullard as Pope himself. The consequent alterations make the hero of the poem a thoroughly incongruous figure, and greatly injure the general design. The poem appeared in this form in 1743, with a ponderous prefatory discourse by Ricardus Aristarchus, contributed by the faithful Warburton, and illustrating his ponderous vein of elephantine pleasantry.

Pope was nearing the grave, and many of his victims had gone before him. It was a melancholy employment for an invalid, breaking down visibly month by month; and one might fancy that the eminent Christian divine might have used his influence to better purpose than in fanning the dying flame, and adding the strokes of his bludgeon to the keen stabs of Pope's stiletto. In the fourteen years which had elapsed since the first *Dunciad*, Pope had found less unworthy employment for his pen; but, before dealing with the works produced at this time, which include some of his highest achievements, I must tell a story which is in some ways a natural supplement to the war with the dunces. In describing Pope's entangled history, it seems most convenient to follow each separate line of discharge of his multifarious energy, rather than to adhere to chronological order.

CHAPTER VI.[1]

CORRESPONDENCE.

I HAVE now to describe one of the most singular series of transactions to be found in the annals of literature. A complete knowledge of their various details has only been obtained by recent researches. I cannot follow within my limits of space all the ins and outs of the complicated labyrinth of more than diplomatic trickery which those researches have revealed, though I hope to render the main facts sufficiently intelligible. It is painful to track the strange deceptions of a man of genius as a detective unravels the misdeeds of an accomplished swindler; but without telling the story at some length, it is impossible to give a faithful exhibition of Pope's character.

In the year 1726, when Pope had just finished his labours upon Homer, Curll published the juvenile letters to Cromwell. There was no mystery about this transaction. Curll was the chief of all piratical booksellers, and versed in every dirty trick of the Grub-street trade. He is described in that mad book, Amory's *John Buncle*, as tall, thin, ungainly, white-faced, with light grey goggle eyes, purblind,

[1] The evidence by which the statements in this chapter are supported is fully set forth in Mr. Elwin's edition of Pope's Works, Vol. I., and in the notes to the Orrery Correspondence in the third volume of letters.

splay-footed, and "baker-kneed." According to the same queer authority, who professes to have lodged in Curll's house, he was drunk as often as he could drink for nothing, and intimate in every London haunt of vice. "His translators lay three in a bed at the Pewter Platter Inn in Holborn," and helped to compile his indecent, piratical, and catchpenny productions. He had lost his ears for some obscene publication; but Amory adds, "to his glory," that he died "as great a penitent as ever expired." He had one strong point as an antagonist. Having no character to lose, he could reveal his own practices without a blush, if the revelation injured others.

Pope had already come into collision with this awkward antagonist. In 1716 Curll threatened to publish the *Town Eclogues*, burlesques upon Ambrose Philips, written by Lady Mary, with the help of Pope and perhaps Gay. Pope, with Lintot, had a meeting with Curll in the hopes of suppressing a publication calculated to injure his friends. The party had some wine, and Curll, on going home, was very sick. He declared—and there are reasons for believing his story—that Pope had given him an emetic by way of coarse practical joke. Pope, at any rate, took advantage of the accident to write a couple of squibs upon Curll, recording the bookseller's ravings under the action of the drug, as he had described the ravings of Dennis provoked by Cato. Curll had his revenge afterwards; but meanwhile he wanted no extraneous motive to induce him to publish the Cromwell letters. Cromwell had given the letters to a mistress, who fell into distress and sold them to Curll for ten guineas.

The correspondence was received with some favour, and suggested to Pope a new mode of gratifying his vanity. An occasion soon offered itself. Theobald, the hero of

the *Dunciad*, edited in 1728 the posthumous works of Wycherley. Pope extracted from this circumstance a far-fetched excuse for publishing the Wycherley correspondence. He said that it was due to Wycherley's memory to prove, by the publication of their correspondence, that the posthumous publication of the works was opposed to their author's wishes. As a matter of fact, the letters have no tendency to prove anything of the kind, or, rather, they support the opposite theory; but poor Pope was always a hand-to-mouth liar, and took the first pretext that offered, without caring for consistency or confirmation. His next step was to write to his friend, Lord Oxford, son of Queen Anne's minister. Oxford was a weak, good-natured man. By cultivating a variety of expensive tastes, without the knowledge to guide them, he managed to run through a splendid fortune and die in embarrassment. His famous library was one of his special hobbies. Pope now applied to him to allow the Wycherley letters to be deposited in the library, and further requested that the fact of their being in this quasi-public place might be mentioned in the preface as a guarantee of their authenticity. Oxford consented, and Pope quietly took a further step without authority. He told Oxford that he had decided to make his publishers say that copies of the letters had been obtained from Lord Oxford. He told the same story to Swift, speaking of the "connivance" of his noble friend, and adding that, though he did not himself "much approve" of the publication, he was not ashamed of it. He thus ingeniously intimated that the correspondence, which he had himself carefully prepared and sent to press, had been printed without his consent by the officious zeal of Oxford and the booksellers.

The book (which was called the second volume of Wych-

erley's works) has entirely disappeared. It was advertised at the time, but not a single copy is known to exist. One cause of this disappearance now appears to be that it had no sale at first, and that Pope preserved the sheets for use in a more elaborate device which followed. Oxford probably objected to the misuse of his name, as the fiction which made him responsible was afterwards dropped. Pope found, or thought that he had found, on the next occasion, a more convenient cat's-paw. Curll, it could not be doubted, would snatch at any chance of publishing more correspondence; and, as Pope was anxious to have his letters stolen and Curll was ready to steal, the one thing necessary was a convenient go-between, who could be disowned or altogether concealed. Pope went systematically to work. He began by writing to his friends, begging them to return his letters. After Curll's piracy, he declared, he could not feel himself safe, and should be unhappy till he had the letters in his own custody. Letters were sent in, though in some cases with reluctance; and Caryll, in particular, who had the largest number, privately took copies before returning them (a measure which ultimately secured the detection of many of Pope's manœuvres). This, however, was unknown to Pope. He had the letters copied out; after (according to his own stating) burning three-fourths of them, and (as we are now aware) carefully editing the remainder, he had the copy deposited in Lord Oxford's library. His object was, as he said, partly to have documents ready in case of the revival of scandals, and partly to preserve the memory of his friendships. The next point was to get these letters stolen. For this purpose he created a man of straw, a mysterious "P. T.," who could be personated on occasion by some of the underlings employed in the underground transactions connected with

the *Dunciad* and the *Grub-street Journal*. P. T. began by writing to Curll in 1733, and offering to sell him a collection of Pope's letters. The negotiation went off for a time, because P. T. insisted upon Curll's first committing himself by publishing an advertisement, declaring himself to be already in possession of the originals. Curll was too wary to commit himself to such a statement, which would have made him responsible for the theft; or, perhaps, have justified Pope in publishing the originals in self-defence. The matter slept till March, 1735, when Curll wrote to Pope proposing a cessation of hostilities, and as a proof of good-will sending him the old P. T. advertisement. This step fell in so happily with Pope's designs that it has been suggested that Curll was prompted in some indirect manner by one of Pope's agents. Pope, at any rate, turned it to account. He at once published an insulting advertisement. Curll (he said in this manifesto) had pretended to have had the offer from P. T. of a large collection of Pope's letters; Pope knew nothing of P. T., believed the letters to be forgeries, and would take no more trouble in the matter. Whilst Curll was presumably smarting under this summary slap on the face, the insidious P. T. stepped in once more. P. T. now said that he was in possession of the printed sheets of the correspondence, and the negotiation went on swimmingly. Curll put out the required advertisement; a "short, squat" man, in a clergyman's gown and with barrister's bands, calling himself Smythe, came to his house at night as P. T.'s agent, and showed him some printed sheets and original letters; the bargain was struck; 240 copies of the book were delivered, and it was published on May 12.

So far the plot had succeeded. Pope had printed his own correspondence, and had tricked Curll into publishing

the book piratically, whilst the public was quite prepared to believe that Curll had performed a new piratical feat. Pope, however, was now bound to shriek as loudly as he could at the outrage under which he was suffering. He should have been prepared also to answer an obvious question. Every one would naturally inquire how Curll had procured the letters, which by Pope's own account were safely deposited in Lord Oxford's library. Without, as it would seem, properly weighing the difficulty of meeting this demand, Pope called out loudly for vengeance. When the *Dunciad* appeared, he had applied (as I have said) for an injunction in Chancery, and had at the same time secured the failure of his application. The same device was tried in a still more imposing fashion. The House of Lords had recently decided that it was a breach of privilege to publish a peer's letters without his consent. Pope availed himself of this rule to fire the most sounding of blank shots across the path of the piratical Curll. He was as anxious to allow the publication, as to demand its suppression in the most emphatic manner. Accordingly he got his friend, Lord Ilay, to call the attention of the peers to Curll's advertisement, which was so worded as to imply that there were in the book letters from, as well as to, peers. Pope himself attended the house "to stimulate the resentment of his friends." The book was at once seized by a messenger, and Curll ordered to attend the next day. But on examination it immediately turned out that it contained no letters from peers, and the whole farce would have ended at once but for a further trick. Lord Ilay said that a certain letter to Jervas contained a reflection upon Lord Burlington. Now the letter was found in a first batch of fifty copies sent to Curll, and which had been sold before the appearance of the Lords'

messenger. But the letter had been suppressed in a second batch of 190 copies, which the messenger was just in time to seize. Pope had of course foreseen and prepared this result.

The whole proceeding in the Lords was thus rendered abortive. The books were restored to Curll, and the sale continued. But the device meanwhile had recoiled upon its author; the very danger against which he should have guarded himself had now occurred. How were the letters procured? Not till Curll was coming up for examination does it seem to have occurred to Pope that the Lords would inevitably ask the awkward question. He then saw that Curll's answer might lead to a discovery. He wrote a letter to Curll (in Smythe's name) intended to meet the difficulty. He entreated Curll to take the whole of the responsibility of procuring the letters upon himself, and by way of inducement held out hopes of another volume of correspondence. In a second note he tried to throw Curll off the scent of another significant little fact. The sheets (as I have mentioned) were partly made up from the volume of Wycherley correspondence;[1] this would give a clue to further inquiries; P. T. therefore allowed Smythe to say (ostensibly to show his confidence in Curll) that he (P. T.) had been employed in getting up the former volume, and had had some additional sheets struck off for himself, to which he had added letters subsequently obtained. The letter was a signal blunder. Curll saw at once that it put the game in his hands. He was not going to tell lies to please the slippery P. T., or the short squat lawyer-clergyman. He had begun to see

[1] This is proved by a note referring to "the present edition of the posthumous works of Mr. Wycherley," which, by an oversight, was allowed to remain in the Curll volume.

through the whole manœuvre. He went straight off to the Lords' committee, told the whole story, and produced as a voucher the letters in which P. T. begged for secrecy. Curll's word was good for little by itself, but his story hung together, and the letter confirmed it. And if, as now seemed clear, Curll was speaking the truth, the question remained, who was P. T., and how did he get the letters? The answer, as Pope must have felt, was only too clear.

But Curll now took the offensive. In reply to another letter from Smythe, complaining of his evidence, he went roundly to work; he said that he should at once publish all the correspondence. P. T. had prudently asked for the return of his letters; but Curll had kept copies, and was prepared to swear to their fidelity. Accordingly he soon advertised what was called the *Initial Correspondence.* Pope was now caught in his own trap. He had tried to avert suspicion by publicly offering a reward to Smythe and P. T., if they would "discover the whole affair." The letters, as he admitted, must have been procured either from his own library or from Lord Oxford's. The correspondence to be published by Curll would help to identify the mysterious appropriators, and whatever excuses could be made ought now to be forthcoming. Pope adopted a singular plan. It was announced that the clergyman concerned with P. T. and Curll had "discovered the whole transaction." A narrative was forthwith published to anticipate Curll and to clear up the mystery. If good for anything, it should have given, or helped to give, the key to the great puzzle—the mode of obtaining the letters. There was nothing else for Smythe or P. T. to "discover." Readers must have been strangely disappointed on finding not a single word to throw light upon this subject, and merely a long account of the negotiations between Curll

and P. T. The narrative might serve to distract attention from the main point, which it clearly did nothing to elucidate. But Curll now stated his own case. He reprinted the narrative with some pungent notes; he gave in full some letters omitted by P. T., and he added a story which was most unpleasantly significant. P. T. had spoken, as I have said, of his connexion with the Wycherley volume. The object of this statement was to get rid of an awkward bit of evidence. But Curll now announced, on the authority of Gilliver, the publisher of the volume, that Pope had himself bought up the remaining sheets. The inference was clear. Unless the story could be contradicted, and it never was, Pope was himself the thief. The sheets common to the two volumes had been traced to his possession. Nor was there a word in the P. T. narrative to diminish the force of these presumptions. Indeed it was curiously inconsistent, for it vaguely accused Curll of stealing the letters himself, whilst in the same breath it told how he had bought them from P. T. In fact, P. T. was beginning to resolve himself into thin air, like the phantom in the *Dunciad*. As he vanished, it required no great acuteness to distinguish behind him the features of his ingenious creator. It was already believed at the time that the whole affair was an elaborate contrivance of Pope's, and subsequent revelations have demonstrated the truth of the hypothesis. Even the go-between Smythe was identified as one James Worsdale, a painter, actor, and author, of the Bohemian variety.

Though Curll had fairly won the game, and Pope's intrigue was even at the time sufficiently exposed, it seems to have given less scandal than might have been expected. Probably it was suspected only in literary circles, and perhaps it might be thought that, silly as was the

elaborate device, the disreputable Curll was fair game for his natural enemy. Indeed, such is the irony of fate, Pope won credit with simple people. The effect of the publication, as Johnson tells us, was to fill the nation with praises of the admirable moral qualities revealed in Pope's letters. Amongst the admirers was Ralph Allen, who had made a large fortune by farming the cross-posts. His princely benevolence and sterling worth were universally admitted, and have been immortalized by the best contemporary judge of character. He was the original of Fielding's Allworthy. Like that excellent person, he seems to have had the common weakness of good men in taking others too easily at their own valuation. Pope imposed upon him, just as Blifil imposed upon his representative. He was so much pleased with the correspondence, that he sought Pope's acquaintance, and offered to publish a genuine edition at his own expense. An authoritative edition appeared, accordingly, in 1737. Pope preferred to publish by subscription, which does not seem to have filled very rapidly, though the work ultimately made a fair profit. Pope's underhand manœuvres were abundantly illustrated in the history of this new edition. It is impossible to give the details; but I may briefly state that he was responsible for a nominally spurious edition which appeared directly after, and was simply a reproduction of, Curll's publication. Although he complained of the garbling and interpolations supposed to have been due to the wicked Curll or the phantom P. T., and although he omitted in his avowed edition certain letters which had given offence, he nevertheless substantially reproduced in it Curll's version of the letters. As this differs from the originals which have been preserved, Pope thus gave an additional proof that he was really responsible for Curll's

supposed garbling. This evidence was adduced with conclusive force by Bowles in a later controversy, and would be enough by itself to convict Pope of the imputed deception. Finally, it may be added that Pope's delay in producing his own edition is explained by the fact that it contained many falsifications of his correspondence with Caryll, and that he delayed the acknowledgment of the genuine character of the letters until Caryll's death removed the danger of detection.

The whole of this elaborate machinery was devised in order that Pope might avoid the ridicule of publishing his own correspondence. There had been few examples of a similar publication of private letters; and Pope's volume, according to Johnson, did not attract very much attention. This is, perhaps, hardly consistent with Johnson's other assertion that it filled the nation with praises of his virtue. In any case it stimulated his appetite for such praises, and led him to a fresh intrigue, more successful, and also more disgraceful. The device originally adopted in publishing the *Dunciad* apparently suggested part of the new plot. The letters hitherto published did not include the most interesting correspondence in which Pope had been engaged. He had been in the habit of writing to Swift since their first acquaintance, and Bolingbroke had occasionally joined him. These letters, which connected Pope with two of his most famous contemporaries, would be far more interesting than the letters to Cromwell or Wycherley, or even than the letters addressed to Addison and Steele, which were mere stilted fabrications. How could they be got before the world, and in such a way as to conceal his own complicity?

Pope had told Swift (in 1730) that he had kept some of the letters in a volume for his own secret satisfaction;

and Swift had preserved all Pope's letters along with those of other distinguished men. Here was an attractive booty for such parties as the unprincipled Curll! In 1735 Curll had committed his wicked piracy, and Pope pressed Swift to return his letters, in order to "secure him against that rascal printer." The entreaties were often renewed, but Swift for some reason turned his deaf ear to the suggestion. He promised, indeed (September 3, 1735), that the letters should be burnt—a most effectual security against republication, but one not at all to Pope's taste. Pope then admitted that, having been forced to publish some of his other letters, he should like to make use of some of those to Swift, as none would be more honourable to him. Nay, he says, he meant to erect such a minute monument of their friendship as would put to shame all ancient memorials of the same kind.[1] This avowal of his intention to publish did not conciliate Swift. Curll next published, in 1736, a couple of letters to Swift, and Pope took advantage of this publication (perhaps he had indirectly supplied Curll with copies) to urge upon Swift the insecurity of the letters in his keeping. Swift ignored the request, and his letters about this time began to show that his memory was failing, and his intellect growing weak.

Pope now applied to their common friend, Lord Orrery. Orrery was the dull member of a family eminent for its talents. His father had left a valuable library to Christ Church, ostensibly because the son was not capable of profiting by books, though a less creditable reason has

[1] These expressions come from two letters of Pope to Lord Orrery in March, 1737, and may not accurately reproduce his statements to Swift; but they probably represent approximately what he had said.

been assigned.[1] The son, eager to wipe off the imputation, specially affected the society of wits, and was elaborately polite both to Swift and Pope. Pope now got Orrery to intercede with Swift, urging that the letters were no longer safe in the custody of a failing old man. Orrery succeeded, and brought the letters in a sealed packet to Pope in the summer of 1737. Swift, it must be added, had an impression that there was a gap of six years in the collection; he became confused as to what had or had not been sent, and had a vague belief in a "great collection" of letters "placed in some very safe hand."[2] Pope, being thus in possession of the whole correspondence, proceeded to perform a manœuvre resembling those already employed in the case of the *Dunciad* and of the P. T. letters. He printed the correspondence clandestinely. He then sent the printed volume to Swift, accompanied by an anonymous letter. This letter purported to come from some persons who, from admiration of Swift's private and public virtues, had resolved to preserve letters so creditable to him, and had accordingly put them in type. They suggested that the volume would be suppressed if it fell into the hands of Bolingbroke and Pope (a most audacious suggestion!), and intimated that Swift should himself publish it. No other copy, they said, was in existence. Poor Swift fell at once into the trap. He ought, of course, to have consulted Pope or Bolingbroke, and would probably have done so had his mind been sound. Seeing, however, a volume already printed, he might naturally suppose that, in spite of the anonymous assurance, it was already too

[1] It is said that the son objected to allow his wife to meet his father's mistress.

[2] See Elwin's edition of Pope's Correspondence, iii., 399, note.

late to stop the publication. At any rate, he at once sent it to his publisher, Faulkner, and desired him to bring it out at once. Swift was in that most melancholy state in which a man's friends perceive him to be incompetent to manage his affairs, and are yet not able to use actual restraint. Mrs. Whiteway, the sensible and affectionate cousin who took care of him at this time, did her best to protest against the publication, but in vain. Swift insisted. So far Pope's device was successful. The printed letters had been placed in the hands of his bookseller by Swift himself, and publication was apparently secured. But Pope had still the same problem as in the previous case. Though he had talked of erecting a monument to Swift and himself, he was anxious that the monument should apparently be erected by some one else. His vanity could only be satisfied by the appearance that the publication was forced upon him. He had, therefore, to dissociate himself from the publication by some protest at once emphatic and ineffectual; and, consequently, to explain the means by which the letters had been surreptitiously obtained.

The first aim was unexpectedly difficult. Faulkner turned out to be an honest bookseller. Instead of sharing Curll's rapacity, he consented, at Mrs. Whiteway's request, to wait until Pope had an opportunity of expressing his wishes. Pope, if he consented, could no longer complain; if he dissented, Faulkner would suppress the letters. In this dilemma, Pope first wrote to Faulkner to refuse permission, and at the same time took care that his letter should be delayed for a month. He hoped that Faulkner would lose patience, and publish. But Faulkner, with provoking civility, stopped the press as soon as he heard of Pope's objection. Pope hereupon discovered

that the letters were certain to be published, as they were already printed, and doubtless by some mysterious "confederacy of people" in London. All he could wish was to revise them before appearance. Meanwhile he begged Lord Orrery to inspect the book, and say what he thought of it. "Guess in what a situation I must be," exclaimed this sincere and modest person, "not to be able to see what all the world is to read as mine!" Orrery was quite as provoking as Faulkner. He got the book from Faulkner, read it, and instead of begging Pope not to deprive the world of so delightful a treat, said, with dull integrity, that he thought the collection "unworthy to be published." Orrery, however, was innocent enough to accept Pope's suggestion, that letters which had once got into such hands would certainly come out sooner or later. After some more haggling, Pope ultimately decided to take this ground. He would, he said, have nothing to do with the letters; they would come out in any case; their appearance would please the Dean, and he (Pope) would stand clear of all responsibility. He tried, indeed, to get Faulkner to prefix a statement tending to fix the whole transaction upon Swift; but the bookseller declined, and the letters ultimately came out with a simple statement that they were a reprint.

Pope had thus virtually sanctioned the publication. He was not the less emphatic in complaining of it to his friends. To Orrery, who knew the facts, he represented the printed copy sent to Swift as a proof that the letters were beyond his power; and to others, such as his friend Allen, he kept silence as to this copy altogether; and gave them to understand that poor Swift—or some member of Swift's family—was the prime mover in the business. His mystification had, as before, driven

him into perplexities upon which he had never calculated. In fact, it was still more difficult here than in the previous case to account for the original misappropriation of the letters. Who could the thief have been? Orrery, as we have seen, had himself taken a packet of letters to Pope, which would be of course the letters from Pope to Swift. The packet being sealed, Orrery did not know the contents, and Pope asserted that he had burnt it almost as soon as received. It was, however, true that Swift had been in the habit of showing the originals to his friends, and some might possibly have been stolen or copied by designing people. But this would not account for the publication of Swift's letters to Pope, which had never been out of Pope's possession. As he had certainly been in possession of the other letters, it was easiest, even for himself, to suppose that some of his own servants were the guilty persons; his own honour being, of course, beyond question.

To meet these difficulties, Pope made great use of some stray phrases dropped by Swift in the decline of his memory, and set up a story of his having himself returned some letters to Swift, of which important fact all traces had disappeared. One characteristic device will be a sufficient specimen. Swift wrote that a great collection of "*my* letters to *you*" is somewhere "in a safe hand." He meant, of course, "a collection of *your* letters to *me*"—the only letters of which he could know anything. Observing the slip of the pen, he altered the phrase by writing the correct words above the line. It now stood—"$\frac{\text{your}}{\text{my}}$ letters to $\frac{\text{me}}{\text{you}}$." Pope laid great stress upon this, interpreting it to mean that the "great collection" included letters from each correspondent to the other—the fact be-

ing that Swift had only the letters from Pope to himself. The omission of an erasure (whether by Swift or Pope) caused the whole meaning to be altered. As the great difficulty was to explain the publication of Swift's letters to Pope, this change supplied a very important link in the evidence. It implied that Swift had been at some time in possession of the letters in question, and had trusted them to some one supposed to be safe. The whole paragraph, meanwhile, appears, from the unimpeachable evidence of Mrs. Whiteway, to have involved one of the illusions of memory, for which he (Swift) apologizes in the letter from which this is extracted. By insisting upon this passage, and upon certain other letters dexterously confounded with those published, Pope succeeded in raising dust enough to blind Lord Orrery's not very piercing intelligence. The inference which he desired to suggest was that some persons in Swift's family had obtained possession of the letters. Mrs. Whiteway, indeed, met the suggestion so clearly, and gave such good reasons for assigning Twickenham as the probable centre of the plot, that she must have suspected the truth. Pope did not venture to assail her publicly, though he continued to talk of treachery or evil influence.

To accuse innocent people of a crime which you know yourself to have committed is bad enough. It is, perhaps, even baser to lay a trap for a friend, and reproach him for falling into it. Swift had denied the publication of the letters, and Pope would have had some grounds of complaint had he not been aware of the failure of Swift's mind, and had he not been himself the tempter. His position, however, forced him to blame his friend. It was a necessary part of his case to impute at least a breach of confidence to his victim. He therefore took the attitude

—it must, one hopes, have cost him a blush—of one who is seriously aggrieved, but who is generously anxious to shield a friend in consideration of his known infirmity. He is forced, in sorrow, to admit that Swift has erred, but he will not allow himself to be annoyed. The most humiliating words ever written by a man not utterly vile, must have been those which Pope set down in a letter to Nugent, after giving his own version of the case: "I think I can make no reflections upon this strange incident but what are truly melancholy, and humble the pride of human nature. That the greatest of geniuses, though prudence may have been the companion of wit (which is very rare) for their whole lives past, may have nothing left them but their vanity. No decay of body is half so miserable." The most audacious hypocrite of fiction pales beside this. Pope, condescending to the meanest complication of lies to justify a paltry vanity, taking advantage of his old friend's dotage to trick him into complicity, then giving a false account of his error, and finally moralizing, with all the airs of philosophic charity, and taking credit for his generosity, is altogether a picture to set fiction at defiance.

I must add a remark not so edifying. Pope went down to his grave soon afterwards, without exciting suspicion except among two or three people intimately concerned. A whisper of doubt was soon hushed. Even the biographers who were on the track of his former deception did not suspect this similar iniquity. The last of them, Mr. Carruthers, writing in 1857, observes upon the pain given to Pope by the treachery of Swift—a treachery of course palliated by Swift's failure of mind. At last Mr. Dilke discovered the truth, which has been placed beyond doubt by the still later discovery of the letters to Orrery. The moral is, apparently, that it is better to cheat a respectable

man than a rogue; for the respectable tacitly form a society for mutual support of character, whilst the open rogue will be only too glad to show that you are even such an one as himself.

It was not probable that letters thus published should be printed with scrupulous accuracy. Pope, indeed, can scarcely have attempted to conceal the fact that they had been a good deal altered. And so long as the letters were regarded merely as literary compositions, the practice was at least pardonable. But Pope went further; and the full extent of his audacious changes was not seen until Mr. Dilke became possessed of the Caryll correspondence. On comparing the copies preserved by Caryll with the letters published by Pope, it became evident that Pope had regarded these letters as so much raw material, which he might carve into shape at pleasure, and with such alterations of date and address as might be convenient, to the confusion of all biographers and editors ignorant of his peculiar method of editing. The details of these very disgraceful falsifications have been fully described by Mr. Elwin,[1] but I turn gladly from this lamentable narrative to say something of the literary value of the correspondence. Every critic has made the obvious remark that Pope's letters are artificial and self-conscious. Pope claimed the opposite merit. "It is many years ago," he says to Swift in 1729, "since I wrote as a wit." He smiles to think "how Curll would be bit were our epistles to fall into his hands, and how gloriously they would fall short of every ingenious reader's anticipations." Warburton adds in a note that Pope used to "value himself upon this particular." It is indeed true that Pope had dropped the boyish affectation of his letters to Wycherley and Cromwell. But such

[1] Pope's Works, vol. i. p. cxxi.

a statement in the mouth of a man who plotted to secure Curll's publication of his letters, with devices elaborate enough to make the reputation of an unscrupulous diplomatist, is of course only one more example of the superlative degree of affectation, the affectation of being unaffected. We should be, indeed, disappointed were we to expect in Pope's letters what we find in the best specimens of the art: the charm which belongs to a simple outpouring of friendly feeling in private intercourse; the sweet playfulness of Cowper, or the grave humour of Gray, or even the sparkle and brilliance of Walpole's admirable letters. Though Walpole had an eye to posterity, and has his own mode of affectation, he is for the moment intent on amusing, and is free from the most annoying blemish in Pope's writing, the resolution to appear always in full dress, and to mount as often as possible upon the stilts of moral self-approbation. All this is obvious to the hasty reader; and yet I must confess my own conviction that there is scarcely a more interesting volume in the language than that which contains the correspondence of Swift, Bolingbroke, and Pope. To enjoy it, indeed, we must not expect to be in sympathy with the writers. Rather we must adopt the mental attitude of spectators of a scene of high comedy — the comedy which is dashed with satire and has a tragical side to it. We are behind the scenes in Vanity Fair, and listening to the talk of three of its most famous performers, doubting whether they most deceive each other, or the public or themselves. The secret is an open one for us, now that the illusion which perplexed contemporaries has worn itself threadbare.

The most impressive letters are undoubtedly those of Swift—the stern, sad humourist, frowning upon the world which has rejected him, and covering his wrath with an

affectation, not of fine sentiment, but of misanthropy. A soured man prefers to turn his worst side outwards. There are phrases in his letters which brand themselves upon the memory like those of no other man; and we are softened into pity as the strong mind is seen gradually sinking into decay. The two other sharers in the colloquy are in effective contrast. We see through Bolingbroke's magnificent self-deceit; the flowing manners of the statesman who, though the game is lost, is longing for a favourable turn of the card, but still affects to solace himself with philosophy, and wraps himself in dignified reflections upon the blessings of retirement, contrast with Swift's downright avowal of indignant scorn for himself and mankind. And yet we have a sense of the man's amazing cleverness, and regret that he has no chance of trying one more fall with his antagonists in the open arena. Pope's affectation is perhaps the most transparent and the most gratuitous. His career had been pre-eminently successful; his talents had found their natural outlet; and he had only to be what he apparently persuaded himself that he was, to be happy in spite of illness. He is constantly flourishing his admirable moral sense in our faces, dilating upon his simplicity, modesty, fidelity to his friends, indifference to the charms of fame, till we are almost convinced that he has imposed upon himself. By some strange piece of legerdemain he must surely have succeeded in regarding even his deliberate artifices, with the astonishing masses of hypocritical falsehoods which they entailed, as in some way legitimate weapons against a world full of piratical Curlls and deep laid plots. And, indeed, with all his delinquencies, and with all his affectations, there are moments in which we forget to preserve the correct tone of moral indignation. Every now and then genuine feeling

seems to come to the surface. For a time the superincumbent masses of hypocrisy vanish. In speaking of his mother or his pursuits he forgets to wear his mask. He feels a genuine enthusiasm about his friends; he believes with almost pathetic earnestness in the amazing talents of Bolingbroke, and the patriotic devotion of the younger men who are rising up to overthrow the corruptions of Walpole; he takes the affectation of his friends as seriously as a simple-minded man who has never fairly realized the possibility of deliberate hypocrisy; and he utters sentiments about human life and its objects which, if a little tainted with commonplace, have yet a certain ring of sincerity, and, as we may believe, were really sincere for the time. At such moments we seem to see the man behind the veil—the really loveable nature which could know as well as simulate feeling. And, indeed, it is this quality which makes Pope endurable. He was—if we must speak bluntly—a liar and a hypocrite; but the foundation of his character was not selfish or grovelling. On the contrary, no man could be more warmly affectionate or more exquisitely sensitive to many noble emotions. The misfortune was that his constitutional infirmities, acted upon by unfavourable conditions, developed his craving for applause and his fear of censure, till certain morbid tendencies in him assumed proportions which, compared to the same weaknesses in ordinary mankind, are as the growth of plants in a tropical forest to their stunted representatives in the North.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ESSAY ON MAN.

It is a relief to turn from this miserable record of Pope's petty or malicious deceptions to the history of his legitimate career. I go back to the period when he was still in full power. Having finished the *Dunciad*, he was soon employed on a more ambitious task. Pope resembled one of the inferior bodies of the solar system, whose orbit is dependent upon that of some more massive planet; and having been a satellite of Swift, he was now swept into the train of the more imposing Bolingbroke. He had been originally introduced to Bolingbroke by Swift, but had probably seen little of the brilliant minister who, in the first years of their acquaintance, had too many occupations to give much time to the rising poet. Bolingbroke, however, had been suffering a long eclipse, whilst Pope was gathering fresh splendour. In his exile, Bolingbroke, though never really weaned from political ambition, had amused himself with superficial philosophical studies. In political life it was his special glory to extemporize statesmanship without sacrificing pleasure. He could be at once the most reckless of rakes and the leading spirit in the Cabinet or the House of Commons. He seems to have thought that philosophical eminence was obtainable in the same off-hand fashion, and that a brilliant style would jus-

tify a man in laying down the law to metaphysicians as well as to diplomatists and politicians. His philosophical writings are equally superficial and arrogant, though they show here and there the practised debater's power of making a good point against his antagonist without really grasping the real problems at issue.

Bolingbroke received a pardon in 1723, and returned to England, crossing Atterbury, who had just been convicted of treasonable practices. In 1725 Bolingbroke settled at Dawley, near Uxbridge, and for the next ten years he was alternately amusing himself in playing the retired philosopher, and endeavouring, with more serious purpose, to animate the opposition to Walpole. Pope, who was his frequent guest, sympathized with his schemes, and was completely dazzled by his eminence. He spoke of him with bated breath, as a being almost superior to humanity. "It looks," said Pope once, "as if that great man had been placed here by mistake. When the comet appeared a month or two ago," he added, "I sometimes fancied that it might be come to carry him home, as a coach comes to one's door for other visitors." Of all the graceful compliments in Pope's poetry, none are more ardent or more obviously sincere than those addressed to this "guide, philosopher, and friend." He delighted to bask in the sunshine of the great man's presence. Writing to Swift in 1728, he (Pope) says that he is holding the pen "for my Lord Bolingbroke," who is reading your letter between two hay-cocks, with his attention occasionally distracted by a threatening shower. Bolingbroke is acting the temperate recluse, having nothing for dinner but mutton-broth, beans and bacon, and a barn-door fowl. Whilst his lordship is running after a cart, Pope snatches a moment to tell how the day before this noble farmer had engaged a

painter for 200*l.* to give the correct agricultural air to his country hall by ornamenting it with trophies of spades, rakes, and prongs. Pope saw that the zeal for retirement was not free from affectation, but he sat at the teacher's feet with profound belief in the value of the lessons which flowed from his lips.

The connexion was to bear remarkable fruit. Under the direction of Bolingbroke, Pope resolved to compose a great philosophical poem. "Does Pope talk to you," says Bolingbroke to Swift in 1731, "of the noble work which, at my instigation, he has begun in such a manner that he must be convinced by this time I judged better of his talents than he did?" And Bolingbroke proceeds to describe the *Essay on Man*, of which it seems that three (out of four) epistles were now finished. The first of these epistles appeared in 1733. Pope, being apparently nervous on his first appearance as a philosopher, withheld his name. The other parts followed in the course of 1733 and 1734, and the authorship was soon avowed. The *Essay on Man* is Pope's most ambitious performance, and the one by which he was best known beyond his own country. It has been frequently translated; it was imitated both in France and Germany, and provoked a controversy, not like others in Pope's history of the purely personal kind.

The *Essay on Man* professes to be a theodicy. Pope, with an echo of the Miltonic phrase, proposes to

> "Vindicate the ways of God to man."

He is thus attempting the greatest task to which poet or philosopher can devote himself — the exhibition of an organic and harmonious view of the universe. In a time when men's minds are dominated by a definite religious

creed, the poet may hope to achieve success in such an undertaking without departing from his legitimate method. His vision pierces to the world hidden from our senses, and realizes in the transitory present a scene in the slow development of a divine drama. To make us share his vision is to give his justification of Providence. When Milton told the story of the war in heaven and the fall of man, he gave implicitly his theory of the true relations of man to his Creator, but the abstract doctrine was clothed in the flesh and blood of a concrete mythology.

In Pope's day the traditional belief had lost its hold upon men's minds too completely to be used for imaginative purposes. The story of Adam and Eve would itself require to be justified or to be rationalized into thin allegory. Nothing was left possessed of any vitality but a bare skeleton of abstract theology dependent upon argument instead of tradition, and which might use or might dispense with a Christian phraseology. Its deity was not a historical personage, but the name of a metaphysical conception. For a revelation was substituted a demonstration. To vindicate Providence meant no longer to stimulate imagination by a pure and sublime rendering of accepted truths, but to solve certain philosophical problems, and especially the grand difficulty of reconciling the existence of evil with divine omnipotence and benevolence.

Pope might conceivably have written a really great poem on these terms, though deprived of the concrete imagery of a Dante or a Milton. If he had fairly grasped some definite conception of the universe, whether pantheistic or atheistic, optimist or pessimist, proclaiming a solution of the mystery, or declaring all solutions to be impossible, he might have given forcible expression to the corresponding emotions. He might have uttered the melan-

choly resignation and the confident hope incited in different minds by a contemplation of the mysterious world. He might again conceivably have written an interesting work, though it would hardly have been a poem—if he had versified the arguments by which a coherent theory might be supported. Unluckily, he was quite unqualified for either undertaking, and, at the same time, he more or less aimed at both. Anything like sustained reasoning was beyond his reach. Pope felt and thought by shocks and electric flashes. He could only obtain a continuous effect when working clearly upon lines already provided for him, or simulate one by fitting together fragments struck out at intervals. The defect was aggravated or caused by the physical infirmities which put sustained intellectual labour out of the question. The laborious and patient meditation which brings a converging series of arguments to bear upon a single point was to him as impossible as the power of devising an elaborate strategical combination to a dashing Prince Rupert. The reasonings in the *Essay* are confused, contradictory, and often childish. He was equally far from having assimilated any definite system of thought. Brought up as a Catholic, he had gradually swung into vague deistic belief. But he had never studied any philosophy or theology whatever, and he accepts in perfect unconsciousness fragments of the most heterogeneous systems.

Swift, in verses from which I have already quoted, describes his method of composition, which is characteristic of Pope's habits of work.

> "Now backs of letters, though design'd
> For those who more will need 'em,
> Are fill'd with hints and interlined,
> Himself can scarcely read 'em.

"Each atom by some other struck
All turns and motions tries;
Till in a lump together stuck,
Behold a poem rise!"

It was strange enough that any poem should arise by such means; but it would have been miraculous if a poem so constructed had been at once a demonstration and an exposition of a harmonious philosophical system. The confession which he made to Warburton will be a sufficient indication of his qualifications as a student. He says (in 1739) that he never in his life read a line of Leibnitz, nor knew, till he found it in a confutation of his *Essay*, that there was such a term as pre-established harmony. That is almost as if a modern reconciler of faith and science were to say that he had never read a line of Mr. Darwin, or heard of such a phrase as the struggle for existence. It was to pronounce himself absolutely disqualified to speak as a philosopher.

How, then, could Pope obtain even an appearance of success? The problem should puzzle no one at the present day. Every smart essayist knows how to settle the most abstruse metaphysical puzzles after studies limited to the pages of a monthly magazine; and Pope was much in the state of mind of such extemporizing philosophers. He had dipped into the books which everybody read; Locke's *Essay*, and Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, and Wollaston's *Religion of Nature*, and Clarke on the *Attributes*, and Archbishop King on the *Origin of Evil*, had probably amused his spare moments. They were all, we may suppose, in Bolingbroke's library; and if that passing shower commemorated in Pope's letter drove them back to the house, Bolingbroke might discourse from the page which happened to be open, and Pope would try to

versify it on the back of an envelope.[1] Nor must we forget, like some of his commentators, that after all Pope was an exceedingly clever man. His rapidly perceptive mind was fully qualified to imbibe the crude versions of philosophic theories which float upon the surface of ordinary talk, and are not always so inferior to their prototypes in philosophic qualities as philosophers would have us believe. He could by snatches seize with admirable quickness the general spirit of a doctrine, though unable to sustain himself at a high intellectual level for any length of time. He was ready with abundance of poetical illustrations, not, perhaps, very closely adapted to the logic, but capable of being elaborated into effective passages; and, finally, Pope had always a certain number of more or less appropriate commonplaces or renderings into verse of some passages which had struck him in Pascal or Rochefoucauld, or Bacon, all of them favourite authors, and which could be wrought into the structure at a slight cost of coherence. By such means he could put together a poem, which was certainly not an organic whole, but which might contain many striking sayings and passages of great rhetorical effect.

The logical framework was, we may guess, supplied mainly by Bolingbroke. Bathurst told Warton that Bolingbroke had given Pope the essay in prose, and that Pope had only turned it into verse; and Mallet—a friend of both—is said to have seen the very manuscript from which Pope worked. Johnson, on hearing this from Boswell, remarked that it must be an overstatement. Pope might have had from Bolingbroke the "philosophical stamina" of the essay, but he must, at least, have con-

[1] "No letter with an envelope could give him more delight," says Swift.

tributed the "poetical imagery," and have had more independent power than the story implied. It is, indeed, impossible accurately to fix the relations of the teacher and his disciple. Pope acknowledged in the strongest possible terms his dependence upon Bolingbroke, and Bolingbroke claims with equal distinctness the position of instigator and inspirer. His more elaborate philosophical works are in the form of letters to Pope, and profess to be a redaction of the conversations which they had had together. These were not written till after the *Essay on Man;* but a series of fragments appear to represent what he actually set down for Pope's guidance. They are professedly addressed to Pope. "I write," he says (fragment 65), "to you and for you, and you would think yourself little obliged to me if I took the pains of explaining in prose what you would not think it necessary to explain in verse"—that is, the free-will puzzle. The manuscripts seen by Mallet may probably have been a commonplace book in which Bolingbroke had set down some of these fragments, by way of instructing Pope, and preparing for his own more systematic work. No reader of the fragments can, I think, doubt as to the immediate source of Pope's inspiration. Most of the ideas expressed were the common property of many contemporary writers, but Pope accepts the particular modification presented by Bolingbroke.[1] Pope's manipulation of these materials causes much of the *Essay on Man* to resemble (as Mr. Pattison puts it) an exquisite mosaic work. A detailed examination of his mode of transmutation would

[1] It would be out of place to discuss this in detail; but I may say that Pope's crude theory of the state of nature, his psychology as to reason and instinct, and self-love, and his doctrine of the scale of beings, all seem to have the specific Bolingbroke stamp.

be a curious study in the technical secrets of literary execution. A specimen or two will sufficiently indicate the general character of Pope's method of constructing his essay.

The forty-third fragment of Bolingbroke is virtually a prose version of much of Pope's poetry. A few phrases will exhibit the relation :—

> "Through worlds unnumber'd, though the God be known,
> 'Tis ours to *trace Him only in our own.*
> He who through vast immensity can pierce,
> See worlds on worlds *compose one universe,*
> Observe how *system into system runs,*
> What other planets circle other suns,
> What varied being peoples every star,
> May tell why Heaven has made us what we are.
> But of this frame, the bearings and *the ties,*
> The strong *connexions,* nice *dependencies,*
> *Gradations* just, has thy pervading soul
> Looked through, or can a part contain the whole?"

"The universe," I quote only a few phrases from Bolingbroke, "is an immense aggregate of systems. Every one of these, *if we may judge by our own,* contains several; and every one of these again, *if we may judge by our own,* is made up of a multitude of different modes of being, animated and inanimated, thinking and unthinking . . . but all concurring in one common system. . . . Just so it is with respect to the various systems and *systems of systems that compose the universe.* As distant as they are, and as different as we may imagine them to be, they are all *tied* together by relations and *connexions, gradations,* and *dependencies.*" The verbal coincidence is here as marked as the coincidence in argument. Warton refers to an eloquent passage in Shaftesbury, which contains a similar

thought; but one can hardly doubt that Bolingbroke was in this case the immediate source. A quaint passage a little farther on, in which Pope represents man as complaining because he has not "the strength of bulls or the fur of bears," may be traced with equal plausibility to Shaftesbury or to Sir Thomas Browne; but I have not noticed it in Bolingbroke.

One more passage will be sufficient. Pope asks whether we are to demand the suspension of laws of nature whenever they might produce a mischievous result? Is Etna to cease an eruption to spare a sage, or should "new motions be impressed upon sea and air" for the advantage of blameless Bethel?

> "When the loose mountain trembles from on high,
> Shall gravitation cease, if you go by?
> Or some old temple, nodding to its fall,
> For Chartres' head reserve the hanging wall?"

Chartres is Pope's typical villain. This is a terse version, with concrete cases, of Bolingbroke's vaguer generalities. "The laws of gravitation," he says, "must sometimes be suspended (if special Providence be admitted), and sometimes their effect must be precipitated. The tottering edifice must be kept miraculously from falling, whilst innocent men lived in it or passed under it, and the fall of it must be as miraculously determined to crush the guilty inhabitant or passenger." Here, again, we have the alternative of Wollaston, who uses a similar illustration, and in one phrase comes nearer to Pope. He speaks of "new motions being impressed upon the atmosphere." We may suppose that the two friends had been dipping into Wollaston together. Elsewhere Pope seems to have stolen for himself. In the beginning of the second epis-

tle, Pope, in describing man as "the glory, jest, and riddle of the world," is simply versifying Pascal; and a little farther on, when he speaks of reason as the wind and passion as the gale on life's vast ocean, he is adapting his comparison from Locke's treatise on government.

If all such cases were adduced, we should have nearly picked the argumentative part of the essay to pieces; but Bolingbroke supplies throughout the most characteristic element. The fragments cohere by external cement, not by an internal unity of thought; and Pope too often descends to the level of mere satire, or indulges in a quaint conceit or palpable sophistry. Yet it would be very unjust to ignore the high qualities which are to be found in this incongruous whole. The style is often admirable. When Pope is at his best every word tells. His precision and firmness of touch enables him to get the greatest possible meaning into a narrow compass. He uses only one epithet, but it is the right one, and never boggles and patches, or, in his own phrase, "blunders round about a meaning." Warton gives, as a specimen of this power, the lines:—

> "But errs not nature from this gracious end
> From burning suns when livid deaths descend,
> When earthquakes swallow or when tempests sweep
> Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep?"

And Mr. Pattison reinforces the criticism by quoting Voltaire's feeble imitation:—

> "Quand des vents du midi les funestes haleines
> De semence de mort ont inondé nos plaines,
> Direz-vous que jamais le ciel en son courroux
> Ne laissa la santé séjourner parmi nous?"

It is true that, in the effort to be compressed, Pope has here and there cut to the quick and suppressed essential

parts of speech, till the lines can only be construed by our independent knowledge of their meaning. The famous line—

"Man never is but always to be blest,"

is an example of defective construction, though his language is often tortured by more elliptical phrases.[1] This power of charging lines with great fulness of meaning enables Pope to soar for brief periods into genuine and impressive poetry. Whatever his philosophical weakness and his moral obliquity, he is often moved by genuine emotion. He has a vein of generous sympathy for human sufferings and of righteous indignation against bigots, and if he only half understands his own optimism, that "whatever is is right," the vision, rather poetical than philosophical, of a harmonious universe lifts him at times into a region loftier than that of frigid and pedantic platitude. The most popular passages were certain purple patches, not arising very spontaneously or with much relevance, but also showing something more than the practised rhetorician. The "poor Indian" in one of the most highly-polished paragraphs—

"Who thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
His faithful dog shall bear him company,"

intrudes rather at the expense of logic, and is a decidedly conventional person. But this passage has a certain glow

[1] Perhaps the most curious example, too long for quotation, is a passage near the end of the last epistle, in which he sums up his moral system by a series of predicates for which it is impossible to find any subject. One couplet runs—

"Never elated whilst one man's depress'd,
Never dejected whilst another's blest."

It is impressive, but it is quite impossible to discover by the rules of grammatical construction who is to be never elated and depressed.

of fine humanity, and is touched with real pathos. A further passage or two may sufficiently indicate his higher qualities. In the end of the third epistle Pope is discussing the origin of government and the state of nature, and discussing them in such a way as to show conclusively that he does not in the least understand the theories in question or their application. His state of Nature is a sham reproduction of the golden age of poets, made to do duty in a scientific speculation. A flimsy hypothesis learnt from Bolingbroke is not improved when overlaid with Pope's conventional ornamentation. The imaginary history proceeds to relate the growth of superstition, which destroys the primeval innocence; but why or when does not very clearly appear; yet, though the general theory is incoherent, he catches a distinct view of one aspect of the question, and expresses a tolerably trite view of the question with singular terseness. Who, he asks,—

> "First taught souls enslaved and realms undone,
> The enormous faith of many made for one?"

He replies,—

> "Force first made conquest, and that conquest law;
> Till Superstition taught the tyrant awe,
> Then shared the tyranny, then lent it aid,
> And gods of conquerors, slaves of subjects made;
> She, 'mid the lightning's blaze and thunder's sound,
> When rock'd the mountains and when groan'd the ground,—
> She taught the weak to trust, the proud to pray
> To Power unseen and mightier far than they;
> She from the rending earth and bursting skies
> Saw gods descend and fiends infernal rise;
> There fix'd the dreadful, there the blest abodes;
> Fear made her devils, and weak hope her gods;
> Gods partial, changeful, passionate, unjust,
> Whose attributes were rage, revenge, or lust;

Such as the souls of cowards might conceive,
And, framed like tyrants, tyrants would believe."

If the test of poetry were the power of expressing a theory more closely and pointedly than prose, such writing would take a very high place. Some popular philosophers would make a sounding chapter out of those sixteen lines.

The *Essay on Man* brought Pope into difficulties. The central thesis, "whatever is is right," might be understood in various senses, and in some sense it would be accepted by every theist. But, in Bolingbroke's teaching, it received a heterodox application, and in Pope's imperfect version of Bolingbroke the taint was not removed. The logical outcome of the rationalistic theory of the time was some form of pantheism, and the tendency is still more marked in a poetical statement, where it was difficult to state the refined distinctions by which the conclusion is averted. When theology is regarded as demonstrable by reason, the need of a revelation ceases to be obvious. The optimistic view, which sees the proof of divine order in the vast harmony of the whole visible world, throws into the background the darker side of the universe reflected in the theological doctrines of human corruption, and the consequent need of a future judgment in separation of good from evil. I need not inquire whether any optimistic theory is really tenable; but the popular version of the creed involved the attempt to ignore the evils under which all creation groans, and produced in different minds the powerful retort of Butler's *Analogy*, and the biting sarcasm of Voltaire's *Candide*. Pope, accepting the doctrine without any perception of these difficulties, unintentionally fell into sheer pantheism. He was not yielding to the logical instinct which carries out a theory to its legitimate development; but obeying the imaginative impulse which

cannot stop to listen to the usual qualifications and safeguards of the orthodox reasoner. The best passages in the essay are those in which he is frankly pantheistic, and is swept, like Shaftesbury, into enthusiastic assertion of the universal harmony of things.

> "All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
> Whose body nature is, and God the soul;
> That changed thro' all and yet in all the same,
> Great in the earth as in the ethereal frame;
> Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
> Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees;
> Lives thro' all life, extends thro' all extent,
> Spreads undivided, operates unspent;
> Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
> As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart;
> As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
> As the rapt seraph that adores and burns;
> To him, no high, no low, no great, no small,
> He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all."

In spite of some awkward phrases (hair and heart is a vile antithesis!), the passage is eloquent, but can hardly be called orthodox. And it was still worse when Pope undertook to show that even evil passions and vices were part of the harmony; that "a Borgia and a Catiline" were as much a part of the divine order as a plague or an earthquake, and that self-love and lust were essential to social welfare.

Pope's own religious position is characteristic and easily definable. If it is not quite defensible on the strictest principles of plain speaking, it is also certain that we could not condemn him without condemning many of the best and most catholic-spirited of men. The dogmatic system in which he had presumably been educated had softened under the influence of the cultivated thought of the day.

Pope, as the member of a persecuted sect, had learnt to share that righteous hatred of bigotry which is the honourable characteristic of his best contemporaries. He considered the persecuting spirit of his own church to be its worst fault.[1] In the early *Essay on Criticism* he offended some of his own sect by a vigorous denunciation of the doctrine which promotes persecution by limiting salvation to a particular creed. His charitable conviction that a divine element is to be found in all creeds, from that of the "poor Indian" upwards, animates the highest passages in his works. But though he sympathizes with a generous toleration, and the specific dogmas of his creed sat very loosely on his mind, he did not consider that an open secession was necessary or even honourable. He called himself a true Catholic, though rather as respectfully sympathizing with the spirit of Fénelon than as holding to any dogmatic system. The most dignified letter that he ever wrote was in answer to a suggestion from Atterbury (1717), that he might change his religion upon the death of his father. Pope replies that his worldly interests would be promoted by such a step; and, in fact, it cannot be doubted that Pope might have had a share in the good things then obtainable by successful writers, if he had qualified by taking the oaths. But he adds that such a change would hurt his mother's feelings, and that he was more certain of his duty to promote her happiness than of any speculative tenet whatever. He was sure that he could mean as well in the religion he now professed as in any other; and that being so, he thought that a change even to an equally good religion could not be justified. A similar statement appears in a letter to Swift, in 1729. "I am of the religion of Erasmus, a Catholic. So I live, so

[1] Spence, p. 364.

shall I die, and hope one day to meet you, Bishop Atterbury, the younger Craggs, Dr. Garth, Dean Berkeley, and Mr. Hutchison in that place to which God of his infinite mercy bring us and everybody." To these Protestants he would doubtless have joined the freethinking Bolingbroke. At a later period he told Warburton, in less elevated language, that the change of his creed would bring him many enemies and do no good to any one.

Pope could feel nobly and act honourably when his morbid vanity did not expose him to some temptation; and I think that in this matter his attitude was in every way creditable. He showed, indeed, the prejudice entertained by many of the rationalist divines for the freethinkers who were a little more outspoken than himself. The deist whose creed was varnished with Christian phrases was often bitter against the deist who rejected the varnish; and Pope put Toland and Tindal into the *Dunciad* as scandalous assailants of all religion. From his point of view it was as wicked to attack any creed as to regard any creed as exclusively true; and certainly Pope was not disposed to join any party which was hated and maligned by the mass of the respectable world. For it must be remembered that, in spite of much that has been said to the contrary, and in spite of the true tendency of much so-called orthodoxy, the profession of open dissent from Christian doctrine was then regarded with extreme disapproval. It might be a fashion, as Butler and others declare, to talk infidelity in cultivated circles; but a public promulgation of unbelief was condemned as criminal, and worthy only of the Grub-street faction. Pope, therefore, was terribly shocked when he found himself accused of heterodoxy. His poem was at once translated, and, we are told, spread rapidly in France, where

Voltaire and many inferior writers were introducing the contagion of English freethinking. A solid Swiss pastor and professor of philosophy, Jean Pierre Crousaz (1663–1750), undertook the task of refutation, and published an examination of Pope's philosophy in 1737 and 1738. A serious examination of this bundle of half-digested opinions was in itself absurd. Some years afterwards (1751) Pope came under a more powerful critic. The Berlin Academy of Sciences offered a prize for a similar essay, and Lessing published a short tract called *Pope ein Metaphysiker!* If any one cares to see a demonstration that Pope did not understand the system of Leibnitz, and that the bubble blown by a great philosopher has more apparent cohesion than that of a half-read poet, he may find a sufficient statement of the case in Lessing. But Lessing sensibly protests from the start against the intrusion of such a work into serious discussion; and that is the only ground which is worth taking in the matter.

The most remarkable result of the *Essay on Man*, it may be parenthetically noticed, was its effect upon Voltaire. In 1751 Voltaire wrote a poem on *Natural Law*, which is a comparatively feeble application of Pope's principles. It is addressed to Frederick instead of Bolingbroke, and contains a warm eulogy of Pope's philosophy. But a few years later the earthquake at Lisbon suggested certain doubts to Voltaire as to the completeness of the optimist theory; and, in some of the most impressive verses of the century, he issued an energetic protest against the platitudes applied by Pope and his followers to deaden our sense of the miseries under which the race suffers. Verbally, indeed, Voltaire still makes his bow to the optimist theory, and the two poems appeared together in 1756; but his noble outcry against the empty and complacent deduc-

tions which it covers, led to his famous controversy with Rousseau. The history of this conflict falls beyond my subject, and I must be content with this brief reference, which proves, amongst other things, the interest created by Pope's advocacy of the most characteristic doctrines of his time on the minds of the greatest leaders of the revolutionary movement.

Meanwhile, however, Crousaz was translated into English, and Pope was terribly alarmed. His "guide, philosopher, and friend" had returned to the Continent (in 1735), disgusted with his political failure, but was again in England from June, 1738, to May, 1739. We know not what comfort he may have given to his unlucky disciple, but an unexpected champion suddenly arose. William Warburton (born 1698) was gradually pushing his way to success. He had been an attorney's clerk, and had not received a university education; but his multifarious reading was making him conspicuous, helped by great energy, and by a quality which gave some plausibility to the title bestowed on him by Mallet, "The most impudent man living." In his humble days he had been intimate with Pope's enemies, Concanen and Theobald, and had spoken scornfully of Pope, saying, amongst other things, that he "borrowed for want of genius," as Addison borrowed from modesty, and Milton from pride. In 1736 he had published his first important work, the *Alliance between Church and State;* and in 1738 followed the first instalment of his principal performance, the *Divine Legation.* During the following years he was the most conspicuous theologian of the day, dreaded and hated by his opponents, whom he unsparingly bullied, and dominating a small clique of abject admirers. He is said to have condemned the *Essay on Man* when it first appeared. He called it a

collection of the worst passages of the worst authors, and declared that it taught rank atheism. The appearance of Crousaz's book suddenly induced him to make a complete change of front. He declared that Pope spoke "truth uniformly throughout," and complimented him on his strong and delicate reasoning.

It is idle to seek motives for this proceeding. Warburton loved paradoxes, and delighted in brandishing them in the most offensive terms. He enjoyed the exercise of his own ingenuity, and therefore his ponderous writings, though amusing by their audacity and width of reading, are absolutely valueless for their ostensible purpose. The exposition of Pope (the first part of which appeared in December, 1738) is one of his most tiresome performances; nor need any human being at the present day study the painful wire-drawings and sophistries by which he tries to give logical cohesion and orthodox intention to the *Essay on Man*.

If Warburton was simply practising his dialectical skill, the result was a failure. But if he had an eye to certain lower ends, his success surpassed his expectations. Pope was in ecstasies. He fell upon Warburton's neck — or rather at his feet—and overwhelmed him with professions of gratitude. He invited him to Twickenham; met him with compliments which astonished a by-stander, and wrote to him in terms of surprising humility. "You understand me," he exclaims in his first letter, "as well as I do myself; but you express me much better than I could express myself." For the rest of his life Pope adopted the same tone. He sheltered himself behind this burly defender, and could never praise him enough. He declared Mr. Warburton to be the greatest general critic he ever knew, and was glad to instal him in the position of cham-

pion in ordinary. Warburton was consulted about new editions; annotated Pope's poems; stood sponsor to the last *Dunciad*, and was assured by his admiring friend that the comment would prolong the life of the poetry. Pope left all his copyrights to this friend, whilst his MSS. were given to Bolingbroke.

When the University of Oxford proposed to confer an honorary degree upon Pope, he declined to receive the compliment, because the proposal to confer a smaller honour upon Warburton had been at the same time thrown out by the University. In fact, Pope looked up to Warburton with a reverence almost equal to that which he felt for Bolingbroke. If such admiration for such an idol was rather humiliating, we must remember that Pope was unable to detect the charlatan in the pretentious but really vigorous writer; and we may perhaps admit that there is something pathetic in Pope's constant eagerness to be supported by some sturdier arm. We find the same tendency throughout his life. The weak and morbidly sensitive nature may be forgiven if its dependence leads to excessive veneration.

Warburton derived advantages from the connexion, the prospect of which, we may hope, was not the motive of his first advocacy. To be recognized by the most eminent man of letters of the day was to receive a kind of certificate of excellence, valuable to a man who had not the regular university hall-mark. More definite results followed. Pope introduced Warburton to Allen, and to Murray, afterwards Lord Mansfield. Through Murray he was appointed preacher at Lincoln's Inn, and from Allen he derived greater benefits—the hand of his niece and heiress, and an introduction to Pitt, which gained for him the bishopric of Gloucester.

Pope's allegiance to Bolingbroke was not weakened by this new alliance. He sought to bring the two together, when Bolingbroke again visited England in 1743. The only result was an angry explosion, as, indeed, might have been foreseen; for Bolingbroke was not likely to be well-disposed to the clever parson whose dexterous sleight-of-hand had transferred Pope to the orthodox camp; nor was it natural that Warburton, the most combative and insulting of controversialists, should talk on friendly terms to one of his natural antagonists—an antagonist, moreover, who was not likely to have bishoprics in his gift. The quarrel, as we shall see, broke out fiercely over Pope's grave.

CHAPTER VIII.

EPISTLES AND SATIRES.

Pope had tried a considerable number of poetical experiments when the *Dunciad* appeared, but he had not yet discovered in what direction his talents could be most efficiently exerted. By-standers are sometimes acuter in detecting a man's true forte than the performer himself. In 1722 Atterbury had seen Pope's lines upon Addison, and reported that no piece of his writing was ever so much sought after. "Since you now know," he added, "in what direction your strength lies, I hope you will not suffer that talent to be unemployed." Atterbury seems to have been rather fond of giving advice to Pope, and puts on a decidedly pedagogic air when writing to him. The present suggestion was more likely to fall on willing ears than another made shortly before their final separation. Atterbury then presented Pope with a Bible, and recommended him to study its pages. If Pope had taken to heart some of St. Paul's exhortations to Christian charity, he would scarcely have published his lines upon Addison, and English literature would have lost some of its most brilliant pages.

Satire of the kind represented by those lines was so obviously adapted to Pope's peculiar talent, that we rather wonder at his having taken to it seriously at a compara-

tively late period, and even then having drifted into it by accident rather than by deliberate adoption. He had aimed, as has been said, at being a philosophic and didactic poet. The *Essay on Man* formed part of a much larger plan, of which two or three fragmentary sketches are given by Spence.[1] Bolingbroke and Pope wrote to Swift in November, 1729, about a scheme then in course of execution. Bolingbroke declares that Pope is now exerting what was eminently and peculiarly his talents above all writers, living or dead, without excepting Horace; whilst Pope explained that this was a "system of ethics in the Horatian way." The language seems to apply best to the poems afterwards called the *Ethic Epistles*, though at this time Pope, perhaps, had not a very clear plan in his head, and was working at different parts simultaneously. The *Essay on Man*, his most distinct scheme, was to form the opening book of his poem. Three others were to treat of knowledge and its limits, of government—ecclesiastical and civil—and of morality. The last book itself involved an elaborate plan. There were to be three epistles about each cardinal virtue —one, for example, upon avarice; another on the contrary extreme of prodigality; and a third upon the judicious mean of a moderate use of riches. Pope told Spence that he had dropped the plan chiefly because his third book would have provoked every Church on the face of the earth, and he did not care for always being in boiling water. The scheme, however, was far too wide and too systematic for Pope's powers. His spasmodic energy enabled him only to fill up corners of the canvas, and from what he did, it is sufficiently evident that his classification would have been incoherent and his philosophy unequal to the task. Part of his work was used for the fourth book of

[1] Spence, pp. 16, 48, 137, 315.

the *Dunciad*, and the remainder corresponds to what are now called the *Ethic Epistles*. These, as they now stand, include five poems. One of these has no real connexion with the others. It is a poem addressed to Addison, "occasioned by his dialogue on medals," written (according to Pope) in 1715, and first published in Tickell's edition of Addison's works in 1721. The epistle to Burlington on taste was afterwards called the *Use of Riches*, and appended to another with the same title, thus filling a place in the ethical scheme, though devoted to a very subsidiary branch of the subject. It appeared in 1731. The epistle "of the use of riches" appeared in 1732; that of the knowledge and characters of men in 1733; and that of the characters of women in 1735. The last three are all that would seem to belong to the wider treatise contemplated; but Pope composed so much in fragments that it is difficult to say what bits he might have originally intended for any given purpose.

Another distraction seems to have done more than his fear of boiling water to arrest the progress of the elaborate plan. Bolingbroke coming one day into his room, took up a Horace, and observed that the first satire of the second book would suit Pope's style. Pope translated it in a morning or two, and sent it to press almost immediately (1733). The poem had a brilliant success. It contained, amongst other things, the couplet which provoked his war with Lady Mary and Lord Hervey. This, again, led to his putting together the epistle to Arbuthnot, which includes the bitter attack upon Hervey, as part of a general *apologia pro vita sua*. It was afterwards called the *Prologue to the Satires*. Of his other imitations of Horace, one appeared in 1734 (the second satire of the second book), and four more (the first and sixth epistles of the first book and the

first and second of the second book) in 1738. Finally, in 1737, he published two dialogues, first called "1738," and afterwards *The Epilogue to the Satires*, which are in the same vein as the epistle to Arbuthnot. These epistles and imitations of Horace, with the so-called prologue and epilogue, took up the greatest part of Pope's energy during the years in which his intellect was at its best, and show his finest technical qualities. The *Essay on Man* was on hand during the early part of this period, the epistles and satires representing a ramification from the same inquiry. But the essay shows the weak side of Pope, whilst his most remarkable qualities are best represented by these subsidiary writings. The reason will be sufficiently apparent after a brief examination, which will also give occasion for saying what still remains to be said in regard to Pope as a literary artist.

The weakness already conspicuous in the *Essay on Man* mars the effect of the *Ethic Epistles*. His work tends to be rather an aggregation than an organic whole. He was (if I may borrow a phrase from the philologists) an agglutinative writer, and composed by sticking together independent fragments. His mode of composition was natural to a mind incapable of sustained and continuous thought. In the epistles he professes to be working on a plan. The first expounds his favourite theory (also treated in the essay) of a "ruling passion." Each man has such a passion, if only you can find it, which explains the apparent inconsistency of his conduct. This theory, which has exposed him to a charge of fatalism (especially from people who did not very well know what fatalism means), is sufficiently striking for his purpose; but it rather turns up at intervals than really binds the epistle into a whole. But the arrangement of his portrait gallery is really unsys-

tematic; the affectation of system is rather in the way. The most striking characters in the essay on women were inserted (whenever composed) some time after its first appearance, and the construction is too loose to make any interruption of the argument perceptible. The poems contain some of Pope's most brilliant bits, but we can scarcely remember them as a whole. The characters of Wharton and Villiers, of Atossa, of the Man of Ross, and Sir Balaam, stand out as brilliant passages which would do almost as well in any other setting. In the imitations of Horace he is, of course, guided by lines already laid down for him; and he has shown admirable skill in translating the substance as well as the words of his author by the nearest equivalents. This peculiar mode of imitation had been tried by other writers, but in Pope's hands it succeeded beyond all precedent. There is so much congeniality between Horace and Pope, and the social orders of which they were the spokesmen, that he can represent his original without giving us any sense of constraint. Yet even here he sometimes obscures the thread of connexion, and we feel more or less clearly that the order of thought is not that which would have spontaneously arisen in his own mind. So, for example, in the imitation of Horace's first epistle of the first book, the references to the Stoical and Epicurean morals imply a connexion of ideas to which nothing corresponds in Pope's reproduction. Horace is describing a genuine experience, while Pope is only putting together a string of commonplaces. The most interesting part of these imitations are those in which Pope takes advantage of the suggestions in Horace to be thoroughly autobiographical. He manages to run his own experience and feelings into the moulds provided for him by his predecessor. One

of the happiest passages is that in which he turns the serious panegyric on Augustus into a bitter irony against the other Augustus, whose name was George, and who, according to Lord Hervey, was so contrasted with his prototype, that whereas personal courage was the one weak point of the emperor, it was the one strong point of the English king. As soon as Pope has a chance of expressing his personal antipathies or (to do him bare justice) his personal attachments, his lines begin to glow. When he is trying to preach, to be ethical and philosophical, he is apt to fall into mouthing, and to lose his place; but when he can forget his stilts, or point his morality by some concrete and personal instance, every word is alive. And it is this which makes the epilogues, and more especially the prologue to the satires, his most impressive performances. The unity, which is very ill supplied by some ostensible philosophical thesis, or even by the leading-strings of Horace, is given by his own intense interest in himself. The best way of learning to enjoy Pope is to get by heart the epistle to Arbuthnot. That epistle is, as I have said, his *Apologia*. In its some 400 lines he has managed to compress more of his feelings and thoughts than would fill an ordinary autobiography. It is true that the epistle requires a commentator. It wants some familiarity with the events of Pope's life, and many lines convey only a part of their meaning unless we are familiar not only with the events, but with the characters of the persons mentioned. Passages over which we pass carelessly at the first reading then come out with wonderful freshness, and single phrases throw a sudden light upon hidden depths of feeling. It is also true, unluckily, that parts of it must be read by the rule of contraries. They tell us not what Pope really was, but what he

wished others to think him, and what he probably endeavoured to persuade himself that he was. How far he succeeded in imposing upon himself is indeed a very curious question which can never be fully answered. There is the strangest mixture of honesty and hypocrisy. Let me, he says, live my own, and die so too—

> "(To live and die is all I have to do)
> Maintain a poet's dignity and ease,
> And see what friends and read what books I please!"

Well, he was independent in his fashion, and we can at least believe that he so far believed in himself. But when he goes on to say that he "can sleep without a poem in his head,

> 'Nor know if Dennis be alive or dead,'"

we remember his calling up the maid four times a night in the dreadful winter of 1740 to save a thought, and the features writhing in anguish as he read a hostile pamphlet. Presently he informs us that "he thinks a lie in prose or verse the same"—only too much the same! and that "if he pleased, he pleased by manly ways." Alas! for the manliness. And yet again, when he speaks of his parents,

> "Unspotted names and venerable long,
> If there be force in virtue or in song,"

can we doubt that he is speaking from the heart? We should perhaps like to forget that the really exquisite and touching lines in which he speaks of his mother had been so carefully elaborated.

> "Me let the tender office long engage
> To rock the cradle of declining age,
> With lenient acts extend a mother's breath,
> Make languor smile, and smooth the bed of death,

Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
And keep awhile one parent from the sky!"

If there are more tender and exquisitely expressed lines in the language, I know not where to find them; and yet again I should be glad not to be reminded by a cruel commentator that poor Mrs. Pope had been dead for two years when they were published, and that even this touching effusion has, therefore, a taint of dramatic affectation.

To me, I confess, it seems most probable, though at first sight incredible, that these utterances were thoroughly sincere for the moment. I fancy that under Pope's elaborate masks of hypocrisy and mystification there was a heart always abnormally sensitive. Unfortunately it was as capable of bitter resentment as of warm affection, and was always liable to be misled by the suggestions of his strangely irritable vanity. And this seems to me to give the true key to Pope's poetical as well as to his personal characteristics.

To explain either, we must remember that he was a man of impulses; at one instant a mere incarnate thrill of gratitude or generosity, and in the next of spite or jealousy. A spasm of wounded vanity would make him for the time as mean and selfish as other men are made by a frenzy of bodily fear. He would instinctively snatch at a lie even when a moment's reflection would have shown that the plain truth would be more convenient, and therefore he had to accumulate lie upon lie, each intended to patch up some previous blunder. Though nominally the poet of reason, he was the very antithesis of the man who is reasonable in the highest sense; who is truthful in word and deed because his conduct is regulated by harmonious and invariable principles. Pope was governed by the instantaneous feeling. His emotion came in sudden jets

and gushes, instead of a continuous stream. The same peculiarity deprives his poetry of continuous harmony or profound unity of conception. His lively sense of form and proportion enables him, indeed, to fill up a simple framework (generally of borrowed design) with an eye to general effect, as in the *Rape of the Lock* or the first *Dunciad*. But even there his flight is short; and when a poem should be governed by the evolution of some profound principle or complex mood of sentiment, he becomes incoherent and perplexed. But, on the other hand, he can perceive admirably all that can be seen at a glance from a single point of view. Though he could not be continuous, he could return again and again to the same point; he could polish, correct, eliminate superfluities, and compress his meaning more and more closely, till he has constructed short passages of imperishable excellence. This microscopic attention to fragments sometimes injures the connexion, and often involves a mutilation of construction. He corrects and prunes too closely. He could, he says, in reference to the *Essay on Man*, put things more briefly in verse than in prose; one reason being that he could take liberties of this kind not permitted in prose writing. But the injury is compensated by the singular terseness and vivacity of his best style. Scarcely any one, as is often remarked, has left so large a proportion of quotable phrases,[1] and, indeed, to the present he survives chiefly by the current coinage of that kind which bears his image and superscription.

This familiar remark may help us to solve the old prob-

[1] To take an obviously uncertain test, I find that in Bartlett's dictionary of familiar quotations, Shakspeare fills 70 pages; Milton, 23; Pope, 18; Wordsworth, 16; and Byron, 15. The rest are nowhere.

lem, whether Pope was, or rather in what sense he was, a poet. Much of his work may be fairly described as rhymed prose, differing from prose not in substance or tone of feeling, but only in the form of expression. Every poet has an invisible audience, as an orator has a visible one, who deserve a great part of the merit of his works. Some men may write for the religious or philosophic recluse, and therefore utter the emotions which come to ordinary mortals in the rare moments when the music of the spheres, generally drowned by the din of the commonplace world, becomes audible to their dull senses. Pope, on the other hand, writes for the wits who never listen to such strains, and moreover writes for their ordinary moods. He aims at giving us the refined and doubly distilled essence of the conversation of the statesmen and courtiers of his time. The standard of good writing always implicitly present to his mind is the fitness of his poetry to pass muster when shown by Gay to his duchess, or read after dinner to a party composed of Swift, Bolingbroke, and Congreve. That imaginary audience is always looking over his shoulder, applauding a good hit, chuckling over allusions to the last bit of scandal, and ridiculing any extravagance tending to romance or sentimentalism.

The limitations imposed by such a condition are obvious. As men of taste, Pope's friends would make their bow to the recognized authorities. They would praise *Paradise Lost*, but a new Milton would be as much out of place with them as the real Milton at the court of Charles II. They would really prefer to have his verses tagged by Dryden, or the *Samson* polished by Pope. They would have ridiculed Wordsworth's mysticism or Shelley's idealism, as they laughed at the religious "enthusiasm" of Law or Wesley, or the metaphysical subtle-

ties of Berkeley and Hume. They preferred the philosophy of the *Essay on Man*, which might be appropriated by a common-sense preacher, or the rhetoric of *Eloisa and Abelard*, bits of which might be used to excellent effect (as, indeed, Pope himself used the peroration) by a fine gentleman addressing his gallantry to a contemporary Sappho. It is only too easy to expose their shallowness, and therefore to overlook what was genuine in their feelings. After all, Pope's eminent friends were no mere tailor's blocks for the display of laced coats. Swift and Bolingbroke were not enthusiasts nor philosophers, but certainly they were no fools. They liked, in the first place, thorough polish. They could appreciate a perfectly turned phrase, an epigram which concentrated into a couplet a volume of quick observations, a smart saying from Rochefoucauld or La Bruyère, which gave an edge to worldly wisdom; a really brilliant utterance of one of those maxims, half true and not over profound, but still presenting one aspect of life as they saw it, which have since grown rather threadbare. This sort of moralizing, which is the staple of Pope's epistles upon the ruling passion or upon avarice, strikes us now as unpleasantly obvious. We have got beyond it, and want some more refined analysis and more complex psychology. Take, for example, Pope's epistle to Bathurst, which was in hand for two years, and is just 400 lines in length. The simplicity of the remarks is almost comic. Nobody wants to be told now that bribery is facilitated by modern system of credit.

> "Blest paper-credit! last and best supply
> That lends corruption lighter wings to fly!"

This triteness blinds us to the singular felicity with

which the observations have been verified, a felicity which makes many of the phrases still proverbial. The mark is so plain that we do scant justice to the accuracy and precision with which it is hit. Yet when we notice how every epithet tells, and how perfectly the writer does what he tries to do, we may understand why Pope extorted contemporary admiration. We may, for example, read once more the familiar passage about Buckingham. The picture, such as it is, could not be drawn more strikingly with fewer lines.

> "In the worst inn's worst room, with mat half-hung,
> The floors of plaister and the walls of dung,
> On once a flock-bed, but repair'd with straw,
> With tape-ty'd curtains never meant to draw,
> The George and Garter dangling from that bed,
> Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,
> Great Villiers lies! alas, how changed from him,
> That life of pleasure and that soul of whim!
> Gallant and gay in Cliveden's proud alcove,
> The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love;
> As great as gay, at council in a ring
> Of mimick'd statesmen, and their merry king.
> No wit to flatter left of all his store!
> No fool to laugh at, which he valued more.
> Thus, victor of his health, of fortune, friends,
> And fame, the lord of useless thousands ends."

It is as graphic as a page of Dickens, and has the advantage of being less grotesque, if the sentiment is equally obvious. When Pope has made his hit, he does not blur the effect by trying to repeat it.

In these epistles, it must be owned that the sentiment is not only obvious but prosaic. The moral maxims are delivered like advice offered by one sensible man to another, not with the impassioned fervour of a prophet.

Nor can Pope often rise to that level at which alone satire is transmuted into the higher class of poetry. To accomplish that feat, if, indeed, it be possible, the poet must not simply ridicule the fantastic tricks of poor mortals, but show how they appear to the angels who weep over them. The petty figures must be projected against a background of the infinite, and we must feel the relations of our tiny eddies of life to the oceanic currents of human history. Pope can never rise above the crowd. He is looking at his equals, not contemplating them from the height which reveals their insignificance. The element, which may fairly be called poetical, is derived from an inferior source; but sometimes has passion enough in it to lift him above mere prose.

In one of his most animated passages, Pope relates his desire to

> "Brand the bold front of shameless guilty men,
> Dash the proud gamester in his gilded car,
> Bare the mean heart that lurks beneath a star."

For the moment he takes himself seriously; and, indeed, he seems to have persuaded both himself and his friends that he was really a great defender of virtue. Arbuthnot begged him, almost with his dying breath, to continue his "noble disdain and abhorrence of vice," and, with a due regard to his own safety, to try rather to reform than chastise; and Pope accepts the office ostentatiously. His provocation is "the strong antipathy of good to bad," and he exclaims,—

> "Yes! I am proud—I must be proud—to see
> Men not afraid of God afraid of me.
> Safe from the bar, the pulpit, and the throne,
> Yet touch'd and shamed by ridicule alone."

If the sentiment provokes a slight incredulity, it is yet

worth while to understand its real meaning; and the explanation is not very far to seek.

Pope's best writing, I have said, is the essence of conversation. It has the quick movement, the boldness and brilliance, which we suppose to be the attributes of the best talk. Of course the apparent facility is due to conscientious labour. In the *Prologue* and *Epilogue* and the best parts of the imitations of Horace, he shows such consummate mastery of his peculiar style, that we forget the monotonous metre. The opening passage, for example, of the *Prologue* is written apparently with the perfect freedom of real dialogue; in fact, it is of course far more pointed and compressed than any dialogue could ever be. The dramatic vivacity with which the whole scene is given shows that he could use metre as the most skilful performer could command a musical instrument. Pope, indeed, shows, in the *Essay on Criticism*, that his views about the uniformity of sound and sense were crude enough; they are analogous to the tricks by which a musician might decently imitate the cries of animals or the murmurs of a crowd; and his art excludes any attempt at rivalling the melody of the great poets who aim at producing a harmony quite independent of the direct meaning of their words. I am only speaking of the felicity with which he can move in metre, without the slightest appearance of restraint, so as to give a kind of idealized representation of the tone of animated verbal intercourse. Whatever comes within this province he can produce with admirable fidelity. Now, in such talks as we imagine with Swift and Bolingbroke, we may be quite sure that there would be some very forcible denunciation of corruption—corruption being of course regarded as due to the diabolical agency of Walpole. During his later years, Pope became a friend

of all the Opposition clique, which was undermining the power of the great minister. In his last letters to Swift, Pope speaks of the new circle of promising patriots who were rising round him, and from whom he entertained hopes of the regeneration of this corrupt country. Sentiments of this kind were the staple talk of the circles in which he moved; and all the young men of promise believed, or persuaded themselves to fancy, that a political millennium would follow the downfall of Walpole. Pope, susceptible as always to the influences of his social surroundings, took in all this, and delighted in figuring himself as the prophet of the new era and the denouncer of wickedness in high places. He sees "old England's genius" dragged in the dust, hears the black trumpet of vice proclaiming that "not to be corrupted is the shame," and declares that he will draw the last pen for freedom, and use his "sacred weapon" in truth's defence.

To imagine Pope at his best, we must place ourselves in Twickenham on some fine day, when the long disease has relaxed its grasp for a moment; when he has taken a turn through his garden, and comforted his poor frame with potted lampreys and a glass or two from his frugal pint. Suppose two or three friends to be sitting with him, the stately Bolingbroke or the mercurial Bathurst, with one of the patriotic hopes of mankind, Marchmont or Lyttelton, to stimulate his ardour, and the amiable Spence, or Mrs. Patty Blount to listen reverentially to his morality. Let the conversation kindle into vivacity, and host and guests fall into a friendly rivalry, whetting each other's wits by lively repartee, and airing the little fragments of worldly wisdom which pass muster for profound observation at Court; for a time they talk platitudes, though striking out now and then brilliant flashes, as from the collision of pol-

ished rapiers; they diverge, perhaps, into literature, and Pope shines in discussing the secrets of the art to which his whole life has been devoted with untiring fidelity. Suddenly the mention of some noted name provokes a startling outburst of personal invective from Pope; his friends judiciously divert the current of wrath into a new channel, and he becomes for the moment a generous patriot declaiming against the growth of luxury; the mention of some sympathizing friend brings out a compliment, so exquisitely turned, as to be a permanent title of honour, conferred by genius instead of power; or the thought of his parents makes his voice tremble, and his eyes shine with pathetic softness; and you forgive the occasional affectation which you can never quite forget, or even the occasional grossness or harshness of sentiment which contrasts so strongly with the superficial polish. A genuine report of even the best conversation would be intolerably prosy and unimaginative. But imagine the very pith and essence of such talk brought to a focus, concentrated into the smallest possible space with the infinite dexterity of a thoroughly trained hand, and you have the kind of writing in which Pope is unrivalled; polished prose with occasional gleams of genuine poetry—the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* and the *Epilogue to the Satires.*

One point remains to be briefly noticed. The virtue on which Pope prided himself was correctness; and I have interpreted this to mean the quality which is gained by incessant labour, guided by quick feeling, and always under the strict supervision of common-sense. The next literary revolution led to a depreciation of this quality. Warton (like Macaulay long afterwards) argued that in a higher sense, the Elizabethan poets were really as correct as Pope. Their poetry embodied a higher and more complex law,

though it neglected the narrow cut-and-dried precepts recognized in the Queen Anne period. The new school came to express too undiscriminating a contempt for the whole theory and practice of Pope and his followers. Pope, said Cowper, and a thousand critics have echoed his words,

> "Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
> And every warbler had his tune by heart."

Without discussing the wider question, I may here briefly remark that this judgment, taken absolutely, gives a very false impression of Pope's artistic quality. Pope is undoubtedly monotonous. Except in one or two lyrics, such as the *Ode on St. Celia's Day*, which must be reckoned amongst his utter failures, he invariably employed the same metre. The discontinuity of his style, and the strict rules which he adopted, tend to disintegrate his poems. They are a series of brilliant passages, often of brilliant couplets, stuck together in a conglomerate; and as the inferior connecting matter decays, the interstices open and allow the whole to fall into ruin. To read a series of such couplets, each complete in itself, and each so constructed as to allow of a very small variety of form, is naturally to receive an impression of monotony. Pope's antitheses fall into a few common forms, which are repeated over and over again, and seem copy to each other. And, in a sense, such work can be very easily imitated. A very inferior artist can obtain most of his efforts, and all the external qualities of his style. One ten-syllabled rhyming couplet, with the whole sense strictly confined within its limits, and allowing only of such variety as follows from changing the pauses, is undoubtedly very much like another. And accordingly one may read in any collection of British poets innumerable pages of versification

which—if you do not look too close—are exactly like Pope. All poets who have any marked style are more or less imitable; in the present age of revivals, a clever versifier is capable of adopting the manners of his leading contemporaries, or that of any poet from Spenser to Shelley or Keats. The quantity of work scarcely distinguishable from that of the worst passages in Mr. Tennyson, Mr. Browning, and Mr. Swinburne, seems to be limited only by the supply of stationery at the disposal of practised performers. That which makes the imitations of Pope prominent is partly the extent of his sovereignty; the vast number of writers who confined themselves exclusively to his style; and partly the fact that what is easily imitable in him is so conspicuous an element of the whole. The rigid framework which he adopted is easily definable with mathematical precision. The difference between the best work of Pope and the ordinary work of his followers is confined within narrow limits, and not easily perceived at a glance. The difference between blank verse in the hands of its few masters and in the hands of a third-rate imitator strikes the ear in every line. Far more is left to the individual idiosyncrasy. But it does not at all follow, and in fact it is quite untrue, that the distinction which turns on an apparently insignificant element is therefore unimportant. The value of all good work ultimately depends on touches so fine as to elude the sight. And the proof is that although Pope was so constantly imitated, no later and contemporary writer succeeded in approaching his excellence. Young, of the *Night Thoughts*, was an extraordinarily clever writer and talker, even if he did not (as one of his hearers asserts) eclipse Voltaire by the brilliance of his conversation. Young's satires show abundance of wit, and one may not be able to say at a glance in what they

are inferior to Pope. Yet they have hopelessly perished, whilst Pope's work remains classical. Of all the crowd of eighteenth-century writers in Pope's manner, only two made an approach to him worth notice. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes* surpasses Pope in general sense of power, and Goldsmith's two poems in the same style have phrases of a higher order than Pope's. But even these poems have not made so deep a mark. In the last generation, Gifford's *Baviad and Mæviad*, and Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, were clever reproductions of the manner; but Gifford is already unreadable, and Byron is pale beside his original; and, therefore, making full allowance for Pope's monotony, and the tiresome prominence of certain mechanical effects, we must, I think, admit that he has after all succeeded in doing with unsurpassable excellence what innumerable rivals have failed to do as well. The explanation is—if the phrase explains anything—that he was a man of genius, or that he brought to a task, not of the highest class, a keenness of sensibility, a conscientious desire to do his very best, and a capacity for taking pains with his work, which enabled him to be as indisputably the first in his own peculiar line, as our greatest men have been in far more lofty undertakings.

The man who could not publish pastorals without getting into quarrels, was hardly likely to become a professed satirist without giving offence. Besides numerous stabs administered to old enemies, Pope opened some fresh animosities by passages in these poems. Some pointed ridicule was aimed at Montagu, Earl of Halifax, in the *Prologue;* for there can be no doubt that Halifax[1] was pointed out in the character of Bufo. Pope told a story in

[1] Roscoe's attempt at a denial was conclusively answered by Bowles in one of his pamphlets.

later days of an introduction to Halifax, the great patron of the early years of the century, who wished to hear him read his Homer. After the reading Halifax suggested that one passage should be improved. Pope retired rather puzzled by his vague remarks, but, by Garth's advice, returned some time afterwards, and read the same passage without alteration. "Ay, now, Mr. Pope," said Halifax, "they are perfectly right; nothing can be better!" This little incident perhaps suggested to Pope that Halifax was a humbug, and there seems, as already noticed, to have been some difficulty about the desired dedication of the Iliad. Though Halifax had been dead for twenty years when the *Prologue* appeared, Pope may have been in the right in satirizing the pompous would-be patron, from whom he had received nothing, and whose pretences he had seen through. But the bitterness of the attack is disagreeable when we add that Pope paid Halifax high compliments in the preface to the Iliad, and boasted of his friendship, shortly after the satire, in the *Epilogue to the Satires*. A more disagreeable affair at the moment was the description, in the *Epistle on Taste*, of Canons, the splendid seat of the Duke of Chandos. Chandos, being still alive, resented the attack, and Pope had not the courage to avow his meaning, which might in that case have been justifiable. He declared to Burlington (to whom the epistle was addressed), and to Chandos, that he had not intended Canons, and tried to make peace by saying in another epistle that "gracious Chandos is beloved at sight." This exculpation, says Johnson, was received by the duke "with great magnanimity, as by a man who accepted his excuse, without believing his professions." Nobody, in fact, believed, and even Warburton let out the secret by a comic oversight. Pope had prophesied in his poem that

another age would see the destruction of "Timon's Villa," when laughing Ceres would reassume the land. Had he lived three years longer, said Warburton in a note, Pope would have seen his prophecy fulfilled, namely, by the destruction of Canons. The note was corrected, but the admission that Canons belonged to Timon had been made.

To such accusations Pope had a general answer. He described the type, not the individual. The fault was with the public, who chose to fit the cap. His friend remonstrates in the Epilogue against his personal satire. "Come on, then, Satire, general, unconfined," exclaims the poet,

> "Spread thy broad wing and souse on all the kind
> * * * * * * *
> Ye reverend atheists. (Friend) Scandal! name them! who?
> (Pope) Why, that's the thing you bade me not to do.
> Who starved a sister, who forswore a debt,
> I never named; the town's inquiring yet.
> The pois'ning dame— (F.) You mean— (P.) I don't. (F.) You do.
> (P.) See, now, I keep the secret, and not you!"

It must, in fact, be admitted that from the purely artistic point of view Pope is right. Prosaic commentators are always asking, Who is meant by a poet? as though a poem were a legal document. It may be interesting, for various purposes, to know who was in the writer's mind, or what fact suggested the general picture. But we have no right to look outside the poem itself, or to infer anything not within the four corners of the statement. It matters not for such purposes whether there was, or was not, any real person corresponding to Sir Balaam, to whom his wife said, when he was enriched by Cornish wreckers, "live like yourself,"

"When lo! two puddings smoked upon the board,"

in place of the previous one on Sabbath days. Nor does it even matter whether Atticus meant Addison, or Sappho Lady Mary. The satire is equally good, whether its objects are mere names or realities.

But the moral question is quite distinct. In that case we must ask whether Pope used words calculated or intended to fix an imputation upon particular people. Whether he did it in prose or verse, the offence was the same. In many cases he gives real names, and in many others gives unmistakable indications, which must have fixed his satire to particular people. If he had written Addison for Atticus (as he did at first), or Lady Mary for Sappho, or Halifax for Bufo, the insinuation could not have been clearer. His attempt to evade his responsibility was a mere equivocation—a device which he seems to have preferred to direct lying. The character of Bufo might be equally suitable to others; but no reasonable man could doubt that every one would fix it upon Halifax. In some cases—possibly in that of Chandos—he may have thought that his language was too general to apply, and occasionally it seems that he sometimes tried to evade consequences by adding some inconsistent characteristic to his portraits.

I say this, because I am here forced to notice the worst of all the imputations upon Pope's character. The epistle on the characters of women now includes the famous lines on Atossa, which did not appear till after Pope's death.[1] They were (in 1746) at once applied to the famous Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough; and a story immediately became current that the duchess had paid Pope 1000*l.* to suppress them, but that he preserved them, with a view to their ultimate publication. This story was repeated by Warton

[1] On this subject Mr. Dilke's *Papers of a Critic.*

and by Walpole; it has been accepted by Mr. Carruthers, who suggests, by way of palliation, that Pope was desirous at the time of providing for Martha Blount, and probably took the sum in order to buy an annuity for her. Now, if the story were proved, it must be admitted that it would reveal a baseness in Pope which would be worthy only of the lowest and most venal literary marauders. No more disgraceful imputation could have been made upon Curll, or Curll's miserable dependents. A man who could so prostitute his talents must have been utterly vile. Pope has sins enough to answer for; but his other meannesses were either sacrifices to his morbid vanity, or (like his offence against Swift, or his lies to Aaron Hill and Chandos) collateral results of spasmodic attempts to escape from humiliation. In money-matters he seems to have been generally independent. He refused gifts from his rich friends, and confuted the rather similar calumny that he had received 500*l.* from the Duke of Chandos. If the account rested upon mere contemporary scandal, we might reject it on the ground of its inconsistency with his known character, and its likeness to other fabrications of his enemies. There is, however, further evidence. It is such evidence as would, at most, justify a verdict of "not proven" in a court of justice. But the critic is not bound by legal rules, and has to say what is the most probable solution, without fear or favour.

I cannot here go into the minute details. This much, however, may be taken as established. Pope was printing a new edition of his works at the time of his death. He had just distributed to his friends some copies of the *Ethic Epistles*, and in those copies the Atossa appeared. Bolingbroke, to whom Pope had left his unpublished papers, discovered it, and immediately identified it with the

duchess, who (it must be noticed) was still alive. He wrote to Marchmont, one of Pope's executors, that there could be "no excuse for Pope's design of publishing it after the favour you and I know." This is further explained by a note added in pencil by Marchmont's executor, "1000*l.*;" and the son of this executor, who published the Marchmont papers, says that this was the favour received by Pope from the duchess. This, however, is far from proving a direct bribe. It is, in fact, hardly conceivable that the duchess and Pope should have made such a bargain in direct black and white, and equally inconceivable that two men like Bolingbroke and Marchmont should have been privy to such a transaction, and spoken of it in such terms. Bolingbroke thinks that the favour received laid Pope under an obligation, but evidently does not think that it implied a contract. Mr. Dilke has further pointed out that there are many touches in the character which distinctly apply to the Duchess of Buckingham, with whom Pope had certainly quarrelled, and which will not apply to the Duchess of Marlborough, who had undoubtedly made friends with him during the last years of his life. Walpole again tells a story, partly confirmed by Warton, that Pope had shown the character to each duchess (Warton says only to Marlborough), saying that it was meant for the other. The Duchess of Buckingham, he says, believed him; the other had more sense, and paid him 1000*l.* to suppress it. Walpole is no trustworthy authority; but the coincidence implies at least that such a story was soon current.

The most probable solution must conform to these data. Pope's Atossa was a portrait which would fit either lady, though it would be naturally applied to the most famous. It seems certain, also, that Pope had received some favours

(possibly the 1000*l.* on some occasion unknown) from the Duchess of Marlborough, which was felt by his friends to make any attack upon her unjustifiable. We can scarcely believe that there should have been a direct compact of the kind described. If Pope had been a person of duly sensitive conscience he would have suppressed his work. But to suppress anything that he had written, and especially a passage so carefully laboured, was always agony to him. He preferred, as we may perhaps conjecture, to settle in his own mind that it would fit the Duchess of Buckingham, and possibly introduce some of the touches to which Mr. Dilke refers. He thought it sufficiently disguised to be willing to publish it whilst the person with whom it was naturally identified was still alive. Had she complained, he would have relied upon those touches, and have equivocated as he equivocated to Hill and Chandos. He always seems to have fancied that he could conceal himself by very thin disguises. But he ought to have known, and perhaps did know, that it would be immediately applied to the person who had conferred an obligation. From that guilt no hypothesis can relieve him; but it is certainly not proved, and seems, on the whole, improbable that he was so base as the concessions of his biographers would indicate.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END.

The last satires were published in 1738. Six years of life still remained to Pope; his intellectual powers were still vigorous, and his pleasure in their exercise had not ceased. The only fruit, however, of his labours during this period was the fourth book of the *Dunciad*. He spent much time upon bringing out new editions of his works, and upon the various intrigues connected with the Swift correspondence. But his health was beginning to fail. The ricketty framework was giving way, and failing to answer the demands of the fretful and excitable brain. In the spring of 1744 the poet was visibly breaking up; he suffered from dropsical asthma, and seems to have made matters worse by putting himself in the hands of a notorious quack—a Dr. Thomson. The end was evidently near as he completed his fifty-sixth year. Friends, old and new, were often in attendance. Above all, Bolingbroke, the venerated friend of thirty years' standing; Patty Blount, the woman whom he loved best; and the excellent Spence, who preserved some of the last words of the dying man. The scene, as he saw it, was pathetic; perhaps it is not less pathetic to us, for whom it has another side as of grim tragic humour.

Three weeks before his death Pope was sending off copies of the *Ethic Epistles*—apparently with the Atossa

lines — to his friends. "Here I am, like Socrates," he said, "dispensing my morality amongst my friends just as I am dying." Spence watched him as anxiously as his disciples watched Socrates. He was still sensible to kindness. Whenever Miss Blount came in, the failing spirits rallied for a moment. He was always saying something kindly of his friends, "as if his humanity had outlasted his understanding." Bolingbroke, when Spence made the remark, said that he had never known a man with so tender a heart for his own friends or for mankind. "I have known him," he added, "these thirty years, and value myself more for that man's love than—" and his voice was lost in tears. At moments Pope could still be playful. "Here I am, dying of a hundred good symptoms," he replied to some flattering report, but his mind was beginning to wander. He complained of seeing things as through a curtain. "What's that?" he said, pointing to the air, and then, with a smile of great pleasure, added softly, "'twas a vision." His religious sentiments still edified his hearers. "I am so certain," he said, "of the soul's being immortal, that I seem to feel it within me, as it were by intuition;" and early one morning he rose from bed and tried to begin an essay upon immortality, apparently in a state of semi-delirium. On his last day he sacrificed, as Chesterfield rather cynically observes, his cock to Æsculapius. Hooke, a zealous Catholic friend, asked him whether he would not send for a priest. "I do not suppose that it is essential," said Pope, "but it will look right, and I heartily thank you for putting me in mind of it." A priest was brought, and Pope received the last sacraments with great fervour and resignation. Next day, on May 30, 1744, he died so peacefully that his friends could not determine the exact moment of death.

It was a soft and touching end; and yet we must once more look at the other side. Warburton and Bolingbroke both appear to have been at the side of the dying man, and before very long they were to be quarrelling over his grave. Pope's will showed at once that his quarrels were hardly to end with his death. He had quarrelled, though the quarrel had been made up, with the generous Allen, for some cause not ascertainable, except that it arose from the mutual displeasure of Mrs. Allen and Miss Blount. It is pleasant to notice that, in the course of the quarrel, Pope mentioned Warburton, in a letter to Miss Blount, as a sneaking parson; but Warburton was not aware of the flash of sarcasm. Pope, as Johnson puts it, "polluted his will with female resentment." He left a legacy of 150*l.* to Allen, being, as he added, the amount received from his friend—for himself or for charitable purposes; and requested Allen, if he should refuse the legacy for himself, to pay it to the Bath Hospital. Allen adopted this suggestion, saying quietly that Pope had always been a bad accountant, and would have come nearer the truth if he had added a cypher to the figures.

Another fact came to light, which produced a fiercer outburst. Pope, it was found, had printed a whole edition (1500 copies) of the *Patriot King*, Bolingbroke's most polished work. The motive could have been nothing but a desire to preserve to posterity what Pope considered to be a monument worthy of the highest genius, and was so far complimentary to Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke, however, considered it as an act of gross treachery. Pope had received the work on condition of keeping it strictly private, and showing it to only a few friends. Moreover, he had corrected it, arranged it, and altered or omitted passages according to his own taste, which naturally did

not suit the author's. In 1749 Bolingbroke gave a copy to Mallet for publication, and prefixed an angry statement to expose the breach of trust of "a man on whom the author thought he could entirely depend." Warburton rushed to the defence of Pope and the demolition of Bolingbroke. A savage controversy followed, which survives only in the title of one of Bolingbroke's pamphlets, *A Familiar Epistle to the most Impudent Man Living*—a transparent paraphrase for Warburton. Pope's behaviour is too much of a piece with previous underhand transactions, but scarcely deserves further condemnation.

A single touch remains. Pope was buried, by his own directions, in a vault in Twickenham Church, near the monument erected to his parents. It contained a simple inscription, ending with the words, "*Parentibus bene merentibus filius fecit.*" To this, as he directed in his will, was to be added simply "*et sibi.*" This was done; but seventeen years afterwards the clumsy Warburton erected in the same church another monument to Pope himself, with this stupid inscription. *Poeta loquitur.*

"*For one who would not be buried in Westminster Abbey.*

Heroes and kings, your distance keep!
In peace let one poor poet sleep
Who never flatter'd folks like you;
Let Horace blush, and Virgil too."

Most of us can tell from experience how grievously our posthumous ceremonials often jar upon the tenderest feelings of survivors. Pope's valued friends seem to have done their best to surround the last scene of his life with painful associations; and Pope, alas! was an unconscious accomplice. To us of a later generation it is impossible to close this strange history without a singular mixture of feelings. Admiration for the extraordinary literary talents,

respect for the energy which, under all disadvantages of health and position, turned these talents to the best account; love of the real tender-heartedness which formed the basis of the man's character; pity for the many sufferings to which his morbid sensitiveness exposed him; contempt for the meannesses into which he was hurried; ridicule for the insatiable vanity which prompted his most degrading subterfuges; horror for the bitter animosities which must have tortured the man who cherished them even more than his victims—are suggested simultaneously by the name of Pope. As we look at him in one or other aspect, each feeling may come uppermost in turn. The most abiding sentiment—when we think of him as a literary phenomenon—is admiration for the exquisite skill which enabled him to discharge a function, not of the highest kind, with a perfection rare in any department of literature. It is more difficult to say what will be the final element in our feeling about the man. Let us hope that it may be the pity which, after a certain lapse of years, we may be excused from conceding to the victim of moral as well as physical diseases.

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